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NIKON D500
Nikon's New Flagship APS-C DSLR

# UPGRADE ISSUE

## Equipment Checklist
The Gear To Replace For Maximum Results

Upgrade Your Gear, Technique And Vision For Better Photos

Camera 2.0: A Technology Wishlist

Adjustment Layers For Nondestructive Editing In Photoshop

# Exceptional Images
## Deserve an Exceptional Presentation



Images by Sal Cincotta, Max Segal, Annie Rowland, Hansong Fong, Kitfox Valentin, Nicole Sepulveda, Neil Simmons

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# 3 Reasons

*WHY PHOTOGRAPHY IS HARDER TODAY, AND MORE FUN, THAN IT'S EVER BEEN AT ANY TIME IN HISTORY.*

## *HERE ARE A FEW REASONS WHY*







### 1 *THAT LITTLE SCREEN CAN WORK AGAINST YOU*

While it's awesome to see what you just took, your problems today start when you press the menu button. Now you see screen after screen of confusing controls and names that don't make sense. Quite honestly, on any given make and model, I only use about 30 percent of those controls and I'm not 100 percent sure that even the folks at the camera manufacturers could tell you what they all even do. If they can't, what chance do we have?

### 2 *WE HAVE TO POST PROCESS OUR IMAGES OURSELVES*

I used to hand my rolls of film to a guy at a lab and he took care of everything. I used to try different guys at different labs to see who did the best job at processing my film. Today, I process my own film in Lightroom and Photoshop. The time that I used to spend shooting is now spent sitting behind my computer.

### 3 *THE COMPETITION IS BRUTAL*

Everybody's a photographer these days. Everybody! And the problem is you can see great images absolutely everywhere. It's not just a handful of people who can make great-looking images these days. It's a flood of people. I had someone ask me recently why it's so hard to get photo credentials to shoot a pro football game or a major league game. I told them it's strictly supply and demand.

There was a time only a handful of photographers had the skills and equipment to shoot pro sports. Today, if a pro team held an open call for photographers to shoot this season, the line would stretch out the door and around the corner. How many wedding photographers are there out there today? If you throw a rock, you'll hear a photographer yell back "Hey, that almost hit the maid of honor!"

## *NONE OF THIS SOUNDS LIKE FUN. WHERE'S THE FUN PART?*

While it may be the hardest time to be a photographer, I think it's absolutely the best time for some of the very same reasons.

### 1 *THAT LITTLE SCREEN CAN WORK FOR YOU*

Knowing which 30 percent of those menu commands to use can get you to a place where your camera is set up for success in your style of shooting. It's a place where all that technology fades away so you can just focus on the creativity, composition and capturing the moment. I know how important all this stuff is and I spend a ton of my time teaching photographers which menus matter, which you can ignore, and which ones really make a difference.

### 2 *WE GET TO PROCESS OUR OWN IMAGES*

Okay, I'll be straight with you. Lightroom is kind of complicated. Photoshop is just plain hard. But is there anybody out there that can make these two so easy that you become an absolute shark at both really quickly? You bet. But it's not just one guy. It's the same handpicked team that founded the National Association of Photoshop Professionals. They're masters at making the impossible easy. The guy who leads this team (it's me by the way) has dedicated his life to making Lightroom and Photoshop understandable and fun for everyone. If you're struggling with either one of those, I know we can help.

### 3 *THE COMPETITION DRIVES US ALL TO MAKE BETTER IMAGES*

Competition drives us all, and there are two things that are going to make you better and give you the edge: lots of practice and great education. You need both. You don't need new gear. You can make amazing images with whatever gear you already have. You just need someone you trust to show you how to do it. Think about it. If somebody told you, straight up, one-to-one, just like they'd tell a friend, exactly what buttons to push, exactly which slider to move – and gave you the inspiration, business advice and proven techniques – tell me that wouldn't make you better in a hurry.

I really believe that's all that stands between you and making the kind of images you've always dreamed about. Each year, tens of thousands of photographers who are having the same struggles and same challenges you are come to my team and me and we help them with all of this. The shooting. How to use their gear. How to learn lighting. How to master Lightroom and Photoshop. How to get the type of images that you know, you absolutely know, are inside you.

You just need a great team behind you, so go ahead and do this. I've got an online course at KelbyOne (that's my online education community for photographers). I want you to take it for free. On me. It's about composition and it's not the same stuff you've read in all the books. I promise you, it will change the way you shoot from here on out. I know it will, because I've heard from photographers all over the world that have told me that exact same thing.

You can register at ***kelbyone.com/composition*** for the free course. The course is called, "Crush the Composition with Scott Kelby," and the offer expires March 15, 2016. After you watch that one class, you'll get us because you'll know right then we're speaking your language. We get you. We can propel you, inspire you, and help you start making the best images you've ever taken. Period. Come see my team and me at kelbyone.com. Let's start working hard and having some fun together.


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FEATURES /// MARCH 2016 /// VOL. 20 NO. 2

/// HOW-TO ///

**34 Shooting A Series**
Ordinary moments become a collection of family treasures
Text & Photography By Meredith Winn

**38 Creativity Unleashed!**
10 simple techniques to develop your photographic vision
Text & Photography By Tom Bol

**46 Focus On The Details**
Create unique images of the natural world using your smartphone
Text & Photography By Meredith Winn






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/// EQUIPMENT ///


**52 Upgrading Your Gear**
To upgrade your photography start by upgrading your equipment
By Ellis Vener

**58 Hands-On: Sony Cyber-shot DSC-RXIR II**
From travel portraits to low-light street photography, this full-frame 42+-megapixel camera delivers excellent image quality in a compact package
Text & Photography By David Schloss

**62 Camera 2.0**
In an era of automated homes and smartphones, why are our cameras so dumb?
By David Schloss


/// SOFTWARE ///


**66 Step Up To Adjustment Layers**
Improve brightness, contrast and color with Photoshop's simplest and most powerful nondestructive editing tools
Text & Photography By William Sawalich


/// COLUMNS ///


**26 Point Of Focus: Onward And Upward**
Simple strategic moves that can help you get focused, inspired and noticed
By Tracey Clark Of Shutter Sisters

**30 Shooting With Soul: Gear For The Soulful Photographer**
Shooting with equipment that complements your individual aesthetic can lead to images with more depth and meaning
By Alessandra Cave


/// DEPARTMENTS ///


**10 Editor's Note**
**12 View**
**18 Next**
**72 Exit**



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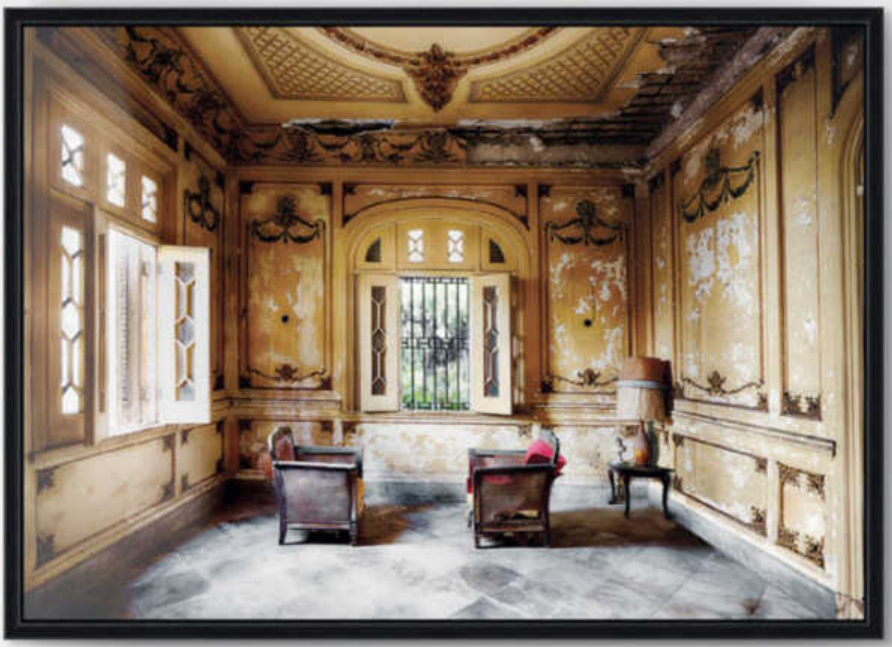


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# EDITOR'S NOTE

At first, I wasn't quite sure why my dad was having me crawl around, in the grass, looking for bugs. With a notepad, a pencil and a magnifying glass, it wasn't a completely unsatisfying way to spend a languid, humid, summer morning in the 1970s. After the last cartoon of the day ended, there wasn't much else to do anyway.

I figured he was just trying to keep me occupied, and probably that was a large part of it. Our weekends consisted mostly of walks, eating food and long talks while gazing at the night sky. Friends and fun were relegated to my weekends with my mother.



PHOTO BY DAVID SCHLOSS

The assignment, the ostensible reason I was out with my pencil and paper, was to draw pictures of the different bugs I found, and I had to come up with a certain number of brand-new bugs every day. I couldn't just get away with drawing a picture of the same ant over and over. I had to look for new bugs. Luckily, there are more species of bugs on the planet than there are humans, and so after picking around the yard for a while, I usually could find my quota, but it took a lot of looking. Sometimes it took hours of sitting in one place and waiting for a new bug to find me.

I can't be quite sure that my father was trying to teach me how to look for things that other people don't see, but there are a few clues that my assignments in entomology were driven by his desire to improve my perception skills, not a desire to find a cheap substitute for a babysitter.

First, he was a commercial and editorial photographer, so he was always looking at things with the eye of someone trying to spot the errant hair on a model's shoulder or detect the pill slightly out of place in the medicine product shot.

Second, he taught martial arts (stick with me here), and while the movie *The Karate Kid* wouldn't arrive for more than half a decade, he already was a fan of the TV show *Kung Fu* and of Sunday martial arts movies on Channel 5. They, too, had martial arts lessons taught through the repetition of simple tasks like raking leaves, hauling water and lifting stones.

It wasn't until decades later, when I was re-watching *The Karate Kid*, that I realized he was having me do the photographic equivalent of "wax on, wax off."

I remember the first time I showed him prints from my work as the photo editor at my college newspaper. I was particularly proud of some work from a local rally where students marched against recent police brutality.

There was one shot he liked among the entire shoot, the rest he was very critical of. I was crestfallen. I felt so good about my work, but he kept pointing out where the composition was off or the exposure was wrong. I felt sure he was being unnecessarily harsh. This same scene played out with all of the shoots I showed him; he'd like a shot or two, at most, and quickly flip through the rest.

I thought he was being dismissive—he and I didn't have a great relationship at this point—and maybe I was right. But I think maybe he was giving me a very valuable lesson in photographic evaluation. He didn't just ignore my work; he was giving me a portfolio review with each new assignment.

I still have every frame I shot in college, hundreds of rolls of print and slide film. While it's nice from a nostalgic point of view, it's nearly all dreadful from a photographic standpoint. It's the work of someone getting to know a camera, trying to figure out how to use lenses and apertures and shutter speeds.

There are a few standout shots for me, maybe a dozen I love. You'd think that the rest—photos of other students, campus buildings, street scenes in New York City—were wasted film. But each one, every single shot, was part of my learning process. Without those lousy photos, I wouldn't be the (hopefully) better photographer I am today.

A good photographer is constantly learning, always striving, always improving. Every photo is built on the backs of the photos that came before it. Failure builds success. Success builds greater success. If you're not pushing yourself, you're not ever going to see how great of a photo you can take.

This issue is about becoming better, in every area of your photography. Becoming better at seeing. Becoming better at capturing. Getting better tools. Getting better at connecting with your creative self. It's about not just unleashing the artistry inside you, but learning to harness it, as well.

You don't even have to crawl around on a lawn with insects, but you'll end up with better photos just the same.

*—David Schloss, Editor*
*@davidjschloss, editors@dpmag.com*

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# SPORTS & LEISURE

## 2015 PHOTO CONTEST

**Digital Photo shares the winning images from the 1st Annual Sports & Leisure Photo Contest. Thank you to all those who submitted, and thank you to our sponsors Hoodman USA, Lexar, LumiQuest, Manfrotto and Vanguard. You can check out all of the winners and finalists at dpmag.com.**

### SECOND PLACE ▶

"AIR SLALOM"

BY GABOR DVORNIK

The Air Slalom is part of a well-known air race, and one of the inventors was a Hungarian pilot. The race goes around the globe like F1 races on land. Shooting the race has some challenges—the planes are fast and light is varied, from dark shadows to sharp sunlight, and it changes in milliseconds. It's one of the most spectacular competitions on Earth!

**Nikon D300, AF-S DX NIKKOR 18-200mm ƒ/3.5-5.6G ED VR II**



## ◀ FIRST PLACE

"UNTITLED"

BY MARC JONES

This has to be my favorite shot of the year. We set out to capture this shot, and we achieved it on the first day, which was a great relief. I had played around with silhouette sunset shots, to some extent, but hadn't really had the best conditions. I discussed the idea with my friend, and he rode solid all day before putting it all on the line to capture the moment. I was about four meters off the ground, perched in a tractor bucket, and placed myself in the perfect spot to get a little lens flare, but not too much. The burning red Australian sunset just worked wonders for the shot.

**Canon EOS 6D, Canon EF 24-70mm ƒ/2.8L II USM, 1/2000 sec. at ƒ/4, ISO 400**



## ▲ PEOPLE'S CHOICE

"EVENING FUN"

BY DON MARTIN

A carnival was setting up at the state fair in Viera, Florida. I enjoy night photography and knew the colors would be great for long exposures. Walking down the midway, I immediately noticed a brightly lit red building facade. I took several photos with the Ferris wheel at a standstill, but felt something was missing from the picture. I took several other shots with the Ferris wheel in motion, and the colored spiral added to the overall effect I was looking for. I composed a little high with no foreground to eliminate the ride attendants from the shot.

**Nikon D810, AF-S NIKKOR 24-70mm ƒ/2.8, MeFOTO tripod, Vello Wireless ShutterBoss, 1.6 sec., 62mm, ƒ/11, ISO 100**



**HONORABLE MENTION ▶**
"UNTITLED"
BY PAUL VINTEN

**▼ HONORABLE MENTION**
"GO JUMP IN A LAKE"
BY DARREN ELIAS





**◀ HONORABLE MENTION**
"UNTITLED"
BY BLAINE STAUFFER

**HONORABLE MENTION ▶**
"CROSS VEGAS"
BY MATT CARTER



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## NEW NIKON FLAGSHIPS

The new flagship **Nikon D5** sets the stage for a whole new era of DSLR design, and will be the benchmark for Nikon cameras for years to come. The D5 has a 20.8-megapixel sensor and a brand-new autofocus sensor with 153 AF points for incredible focus precision. A new EXPEED 5 processor allows the D5 to capture images at up to 12 fps with full autofocus and auto exposure. The D5 captures full 4K video and has a touch-screen panel for focus selection and for settings. List Price: $6,499.




The **Nikon D500** is the long-awaited replacement to the D300S, and it inherits many of the key new features from the D5. The weather-resistant body features a 20.9-megapixel APS-C sensor with the same high-precision AF sensor and processor. The result is a professional-quality APS-C DSLR that can capture images at up to 10 fps, with an ISO range from 100-51,200, expandable up to ISO 1,640,000. The D500 features Nikon SnapBridge, an easier connectivity system that uses Bluetooth to connect to a smart device and automatically transfer images without having to reconnect.




An optional WiFi module is available for faster WiFi transfer. The D500 is capable of capturing 4K video at up to 30p and full HD video at various frame rates, and can output to an external recorder. List Price: $1,999.

**Contact:** Nikon, nikonusa.com.

## SONY SLT-a68

The **SLT-a68** from **Sony** is shipping to the U.S. and Canada this April. Compatible with Sony's A-mount lenses, the a68 is built around a new, 24-megapixel, APS-C-sized sensor with an ISO range of 100-25,600. Trickle-down features from higher-end cameras like the a77 II include 79 AF points for wider and faster autofocus. Continuous shooting speeds up to 8 fps (with AF), customizable controls and advanced video features such as clean HDMI out add value to this reasonably priced camera. List Price: $600 (body only); $700 (with DT 18-55mm F3.5-5.6 SAM II lens).
**Contact:** Sony, store.sony.com.



## TOPAZ TEXTURE EFFECTS SOFTWARE

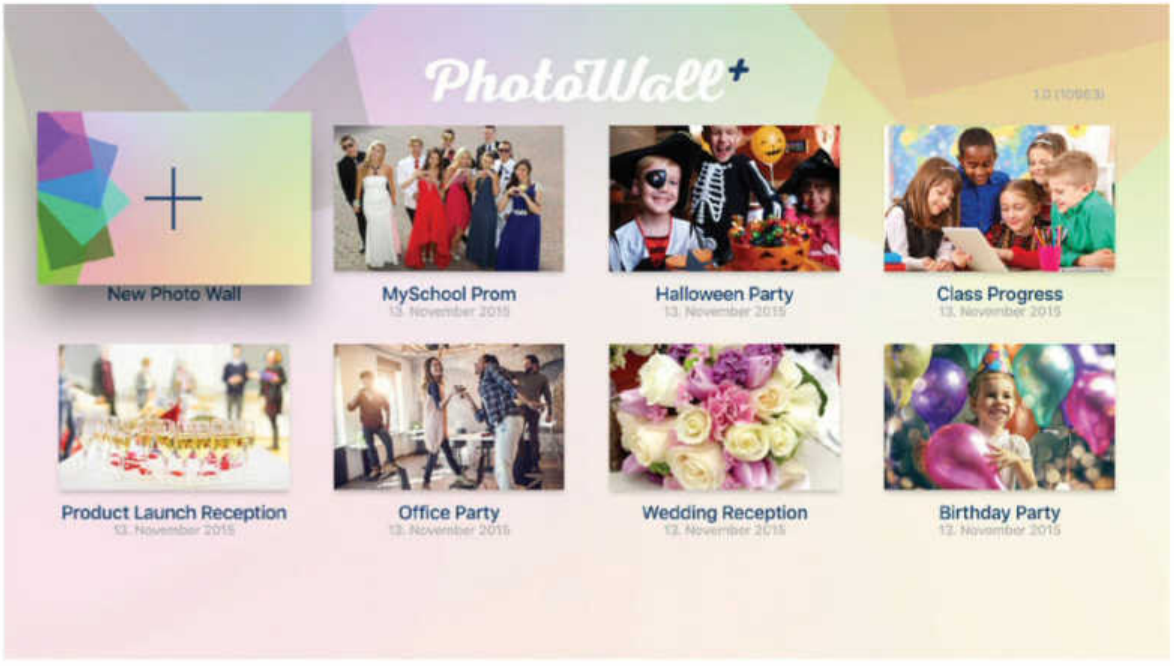
Available as a plug-in or standalone software, **Topaz Texture Effects**, as the name implies, provides a wealth of options for adding textures, as well as dust and scratches, lens flare, light leaks and more. The application comes with 130 full effects, in addition to more than 275 elements to create custom looks. You can easily add textures you've created or purchased elsewhere. User-created effects can be downloaded or shared via the new online Topaz Community. This easy-to-use, cross-platform software also provides basic image-editing tools, masking, layers and additional workflow features. List Price: $70. **Contact:** Topaz Labs, topazlabs.com.






## SIGMA WR CERAMIC PROTECTOR FILTER

Lens filters don't get any tougher than **Sigma**'s **Water Repellent (WR) Ceramic Protector**. This clear ceramic glass filter is shock- and scratch-resistant, with a water-repellent coating that not only protects the front of your lens, but also repels water, dust and oil, making it easier to clean stray fingerprints and smudges. The Sigma clear glass ceramic material is 10 times stronger than conventional filters and three times stronger than those that are chemically strengthened. At the same time, it's up to 50% thinner and up to 30% lighter than previous Sigma filters. It's available for lenses with front filter threads that range from 67mm to 105mm in diameter. List Price: $93-$315. **Contact:** Sigma, sigmaphoto.com.




## BOINX PHOTOWALL+

Perfect for parties and events, but also useful for businesses, educators and the classroom, **Boinx Software**'s **PhotoWall+** (formerly named PartySnapper) is one of the first apps developed specifically for the latest-generation Apple TV. Two apps work together to create a live display of photos on Apple TV: PhotoWall+ for the Apple TV and a free PhotoWall+ Camera for iOS devices to shoot and share images. Images are stored in iCloud, and users can download and share their photos with a web app. List Price: $4.99 (PhotoWall+ for Apple TV); free (PhotoWall+ Camera). **Contact:** Boinx Software, boinx.com.

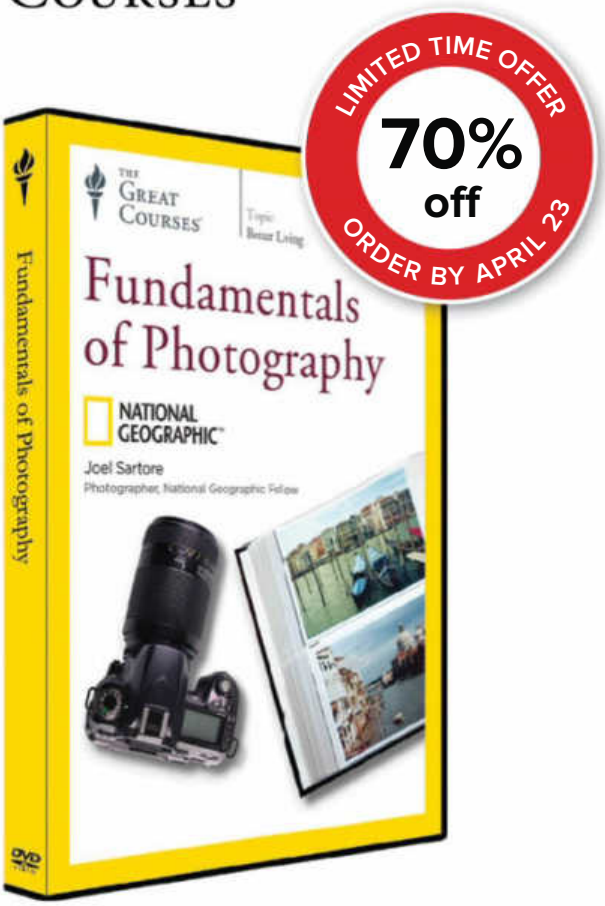
## LIGHTROOM FOR ANDROID 1.4

Good news for Android users. **Lightroom for Android version 1.4** is now available as a free download on Google Play and doesn't require a paid Creative Cloud subscription. Although you can't sync your images and edits with the desktop version of Lightroom without a CC subscription, you still have full access to all of the mobile app's features on your Android device. And, since Lollipop allows you to capture raw DNG files, you now can process them in Lightroom mobile for Android. **Contact:** Google Play, play.google.com; Adobe, adobe.com.



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## SIRUI MYSTORY PHOTO SHOULDER BAGS

**Sirui**'s line of **MyStory Photo Shoulder Bags** comes in five different sizes to accommodate a range of equipment, from mirrorless cameras with two lenses and an 8-inch tablet to a full DSLR setup with up to 5 lenses and a 15-inch laptop. Highly functional, the shoulder bags are constructed from water-resistant canvas and feature an expandable flap top for easy access, a removable insert and a tripod holder/water bottle pouch. Accented with natural leather and antique silver finished hardware, these messenger-style shoulder bags are designed to look good, too. List Price: From $170. **Contact:** Argraph, argraph.com.




## BOSSTRAP

The cross-body **Sliding Sling Camera Strap** from **BosStrap** is a good replacement for the neck strap that came with your camera. The strap has been updated and now features a quick-release buckle so you can easily disconnect the camera with one hand. That adds to the strap's already useful features, including the fact that it attaches to the camera strap lug rather than the camera's tripod socket. And, because there's no bulky shoulder pad, the strap can be neatly wrapped around the camera or lens for stowing in a camera bag. The straps are available for DSLRs and mirrorless cameras. Conversion kits can be purchased to update earlier BosStrap models. List Price: $54 (DSLR); $53 (mirrorless); $20 (conversion kit). **Contact:** BosStrap, BosStrap.com.



## TAMRAC G-ELITE BACKPACKS

The merger of Tamrac and Gura Gear brings photographers a new line of backpacks. The **Tamrac G-ELITE G32** and **G26** are reminiscent of Gura Gear's Kiboko and Bataflae designs with their convenient "butterfly"-type openings. The G32 has plenty of room for pro DSLRs with a 500mm lens attached (up to an 800mm detached lens) or a medium-format system. The G26 carries the same gear, but maxes out at a 500mm lens. Rugged, but lightweight, the backpacks come with a lifetime guarantee. List Price: $430 (G32); $380 (G26). **Contact:** Tamrac, tamrac.com.

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## 3POD TRIPODS, MONOPODS, BALLHEADS & VIDEO HEADS

If you're looking for a new support system, **3Pod** has a line of functional—and affordable—tripods and monopods. The **Orbit Overhead Shot System Tripods**, available in aluminum or carbon fiber, come in 3-section and 4-section models with an interesting twist. The center column can be extended upward and tilted for photographing subjects overhead or at low angles. Also available in aluminum or carbon fiber, the 4-section monopod comes with a pivoting fluid base for easy panning. The 3Pod line includes a tabletop tripod, as well as an assortment of heads for both still and video. List Price: From $75 (monopod); From $200 (3-section tripod). **Contact:** Adorama, adorama.com.

## WESTCOTT FLEX LED MATS

**Westcott** has expanded its line of **FLEX LED Mats**, which includes the earlier released daylight and tungsten 10"x10" models. Several new sizes including 10"x3", 1'x1', 1'x2', 1'x3' and 2'x2' daylight (5600K) models are now available. Additionally, Westcott released Bi-Color versions of the 10"x3", 1'x1' and 1'x2' Flex LED Mats with adjustable color temperatures between 2800K and 6000K. These flexible mats are lightweight, portable and compatible with the new Scrim Jim Cine system. List Price: From $300. **Contact:** Westcott, fjwestcott.com.



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# Onward And Upward

## SIMPLE STRATEGIC MOVES THAT CAN HELP YOU GET FOCUSED, INSPIRED AND NOTICED

**BY TRACEY CLARK OF SHUTTER SISTERS**





The desire and drive to continually improve one's craft is something that creatives share. It's as though there's always the next skill to master, the next step to take or the next level to reach. There are infinite ways to grow and evolve as artists, photographers and businesspeople, but it's not always easy to know where to start. It may seem surprising, but some of the best strategies are the simplest.

Often when we're on a quest to achieve "more," we not only lose patience (with ourselves or our circumstances), we lose perspective and become overwhelmed. Feeling overwhelmed can lead to paralysis. When it's time to move forward in our creativity or in our career (the two of which are often interwoven), it's important to remember the sentiment of Lao Tzu: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Following some simple strategies can help move you forward in improving and enhancing your photographic journey, one step at a time.

**Get Better.** I'm not sure I subscribe to the adage, "practice makes perfect," but I do believe that improvement certainly does come from repetition. Photography, like every other creative outlet, takes practice. Doing it over and over again, day in and day out, not only can help you get into a creative groove, it can help you learn how to best use the tools of the trade. Our camera kits (however elaborate or basic) are our creative allies. The better we know the ins and outs of our gear, the better we can use our equipment to its fullest and achieve optimum results. Beyond solo practice, you can attend classes, read books or study online tutorials. Sometimes hearing things from outside sources can illuminate those light bulbs and help you see things in a new (and improved) way.

**Get Focused.** Quite often, before you can answer the question of *how* to improve, it's important to understand your *what* and your *why*. You have to really sort stuff out in your head and heart, and get focused. By asking yourself some simple (yet profound) questions about what exactly your motivation is, you can identify what steps to take first. Distilling the reasons "why" you take pictures can also help you set some goals for your journey. Sure, you can dream big and identify your ideal photo assignment, for example, but you can also set up mini-goals that you can work on toward that goal and achieve these milestones on a smaller scale. Knowing why you want to improve and in what capacity you want to see your improvement can help you to recognize your progress. Reaching your goal is a lot more exciting and satisfying when you have markers you're able to meet along the way.

**Get Connected.** Art can often feel like a solitary activity, and photography is no exception. Oftentimes, we're alone in creating our work. But, it's important to remember that family, friends, clients, colleagues and even seeming strangers can help us reach that next plateau. I was recently asked by a graduating senior at my college alma mater what advice I would give her as she was about to embark on seeking employment. I told her not to be shy about sharing her interests and intentions with anyone who would listen. You'll never know who might be able to help you unless you let them know what

you're interested in. I landed my very first photography job by striking up a conversation with a wedding photographer at the photo lab where I was working at the time. Had I not started small talk with him (about his work), I never would have been offered a job at his studio. It was one of the most memorable and pivotal moments in my early career, and it all came from simple conversation with a stranger, who ended up becoming my mentor.

**Get In Touch.** Beyond being open and congenial in your everyday life, you can choose to be a little more overtly extroverted about your goals with people in your field of interest. Make a point of tapping into resources and reach out to people who you think may want to help you. More often than not, people are excited and glad to help. Let this be a reminder never to burn bridges with people, especially those in the industry you're interested in. The world can be a small place and relationships matter. You never know who you might work with (or want to work with) in the future. And, although many might think that cold-calling might be fruitless, it very well could be worth your efforts. I recently listened to a new photographer speak on how she finds most of her clients. Her secret weapon was the art of the cold call. Making connections, making yourself known and then reaching out when the time is right is one of the most effective ways to moving forward.





**Get Tuned In.** It's critical to pay attention to the trends of the specific photography genres you're interested in. Get to know the players, follow other photographers' work, keep up with industry standards and developments, and read articles and books that focus on your photo interests, and you'll better understand how you, too, might get more involved in that particular field of photography. I choose not to look at my photographer counterpoints as competition (there's enough work for everyone!), but use them more as motivation. Paying attention to what your fellow colleagues are doing might help you take steps toward what you want to do (or might not want to do) next.

**Get Noticed.** If you're looking to get hired for a photo assignment (or anything else), the critical part to your process is to be seen. No one will hire you if they don't know your work. In the age of the web and the visual glory of digital images on glowing device screens, there's no reason why you shouldn't be using that to your greatest advantage. A website (or even a simple web page) is an obvious "must," but even still, how do you get people there? Social media is the name of the game in getting eyes on your work. You basically have to find the people you want to work with and see to it that they learn about you and your work. Engaging with people, companies and brands can be the key to getting recognized.

Once you get their attention, then you can let your work speak for you. Just make sure that you're showing them the work you're most proud of, the images that are indicative of your talents and passion, and demonstrate to them, through your engagement, that you're the kind of person they want to work with. This form of social-media engagement is a modern (and more fun) form of cold-calling, and it can be extremely effective.

**Get Inspired.** Never underestimate the power of inspiration. When we're inspired, our work is influenced in the best way possible. Motivation, expression, excitement, passion all can inform and enhance our photography, not to mention, make the process and the end result that much more enjoyable. There are all kinds of ways to find inspiration, from the simple to the extravagant. Take a class, take a photo walk, meet and shoot with a photographer friend, join a photography club, go to a museum, travel, attend a photo workshop (local or in a new area), try new gear (rent or buy), shoot a brand-new subject, follow photo prompts, etc. The list of opportunities and possibilities is endless. Tap into what you have the time and the budget for, and just do it. You'll be glad you did! DP



***TRACEY CLARK** is the founder of Shutter Sisters, a collaborative photo blog and thriving community of female photo enthusiasts, **shuttersisters.com**. Learn more about Tracey and her work at **traceyclark.com**.*

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# Gear For The Soulful Photographer

SHOOTING WITH EQUIPMENT THAT COMPLEMENTS YOUR INDIVIDUAL AESTHETIC CAN LEAD TO IMAGES WITH MORE DEPTH AND MEANING

BY ALESSANDRA CAVE



*"Photography is not about cameras, gadgets and gismos. Photography is about photographers. A camera didn't make a great picture any more than a typewriter wrote a great novel."*

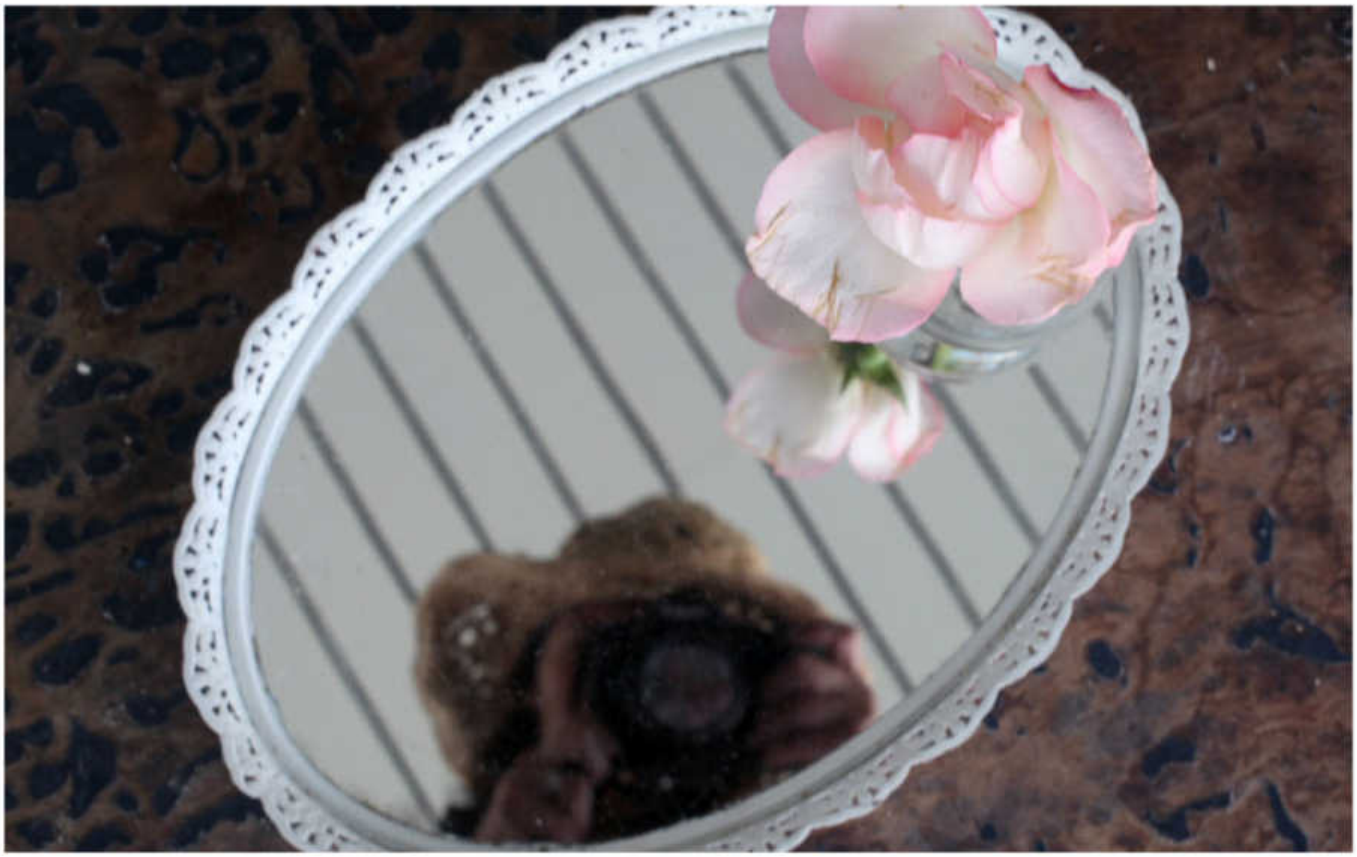
*—Peter Adams, Sydney, 1978*

When we make the decision to take our passion for photography to the next level, our first instinct is to upgrade our gear. However, while we can improve the quality of our output images by shooting with higher-end equipment, in order to improve our skills and create images with depth and meaning, we first need to examine who we are as individuals and photographers.

It's easy to get caught up in technology advancements and what's possible to achieve with the top-of-the-line gear that's widely accessible these days. But we must remember that to shoot images with a strong point of view, we need to choose gear that's an extension of our eyes and soul. Our cameras, lenses and accessories need to match our individual sense of aesthetics, and they need to allow us to shoot consistently, intuitively and with confidence.

For this exercise, I invite you to explore who you are as an individual and as a photographer.





## GUIDELINES

**Aesthetics.** Start a pinboard, gathering images that have some of the qualities you aspire to achieve in your own work. Ask yourself what sort of images you're most drawn to and what gear was used to obtain those results.

**Functionality.** Make a list of the features or tools you're missing in your current toolkit, and another, with equipment and features you use the most. Look for ways to simplify your process. What type of functions could make your photography work or practice more enjoyable, efficient and intuitive?

**Portability.** Consider your shooting style and lifestyle, and choose equipment that's compatible with that. What size and weight of camera bag are you willing to lug around? Will you use your gear daily or occasionally?

**Personal Rhythm.** Investigate the unique way you see, feel and move in the world. What's your speed, motivation and style?

**Confidence.** Notice how you feel when you hold a certain camera in your hands. You need to feel confident that your gear will allow you to fully express your point of view. Which gear makes you feel most empowered?

## TIPS

**Maximizing your gear.** Don't upgrade for the sake of upgrading. Are you familiar with all the features and settings of your current camera and accessories? Sometimes the good ol' manual can be very helpful to clear up some basic functionality questions. You also can seek troubleshooting videos and articles online, or you could take a class that's focused on understanding your equipment.

**Repairing your gear.** Take your gear to the repair shop. Just like anything, sometimes your gear needs some love, and with minor tuning or repairs, you might feel excited about your equipment's performance once again. Sometimes cleaning the sensor or the lens professionally can do wonders!

**Testing new gear.** Renting equipment is just about the best thing ever! Why take the plunge on expensive new gear before testing it out? The best way to find out if certain equipment is right for you is to try it. Not sure if you like one brand over another? Try them both. Ask about equipment rental rates at your local camera shop and start exploring!



**Upgrading your gear.** Once you've gone through all the steps above, ask yourself once again: What's missing in my current kit? What's it for? Why do I need it? And, finally, ask yourself how much you're willing to spend to achieve your goals. Make sure that what you're willing to spend is on par with what you *need* versus what you *want*. DP



***ALESSANDRA CAVE** is a commercial and editorial photographer living in San Francisco. She's also a writer, a teacher and the author of "Shooting with Soul" (Quarry Books, 2013, quarrybooks.com), an inspiration and technique book with 44 photography exercises exploring life, beauty and self-expression, and upon which this column is inspired. Learn more about Alessandra and follow her work at **alessandracave.com**.*


SAINTS



# shooting a series

## ORDINARY MOMENTS BECOME A COLLECTION OF FAMILY TREASURES

**TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEREDITH WINN**

Long before the days of #hashtags, dipping back in time when social media was a new phenomenon, photographers shot in series to collect a grouping of "similars"—images that documented a specific location or subject over time. This is an interesting practice that not only shows how you grow as a photographer, but shows how the location changes or how the subject grows along with you. The creative constraints you may fear from repetitively shooting the same thing over and over actually will get you thinking outside the box.

I remember the first time I saw what I'd come to call "the couch scene" through my camera in 2011. I stopped what I was doing, grabbed my Nikon and pointed my lens at my children in creative play. My kids were eight and six years old then, newly connected in a newly blended, now larger family. These new siblings were totally immersed in the imaginative play of boys and their LEGOs. As my shutter clicked, they both looked up and *watched me* as I *watched them* with my camera. They froze like animals on display in a zoo



before taking off as fast as they could. This wasn't the reaction I was expecting!

My son grew up with a camera always present; therefore, he had an ingrained response within him to simply *ignore what I was doing*. It left me free to go about my business documenting our life as any photographer would, and he grew to be a photographer's son. This shared dynamic created a sense of "moment undisturbed" in my images from early on in his childhood, but in this new family dynamic, I realized that the big camera wasn't always going to be the best option to document my new family.

A few days later, I walked past the boys on the couch again. The couch quickly was becoming the gathering space for new siblings and moments of spontaneous connection. What I was witnessing each time I passed the couch was our family learning how to become a family. So, instead of reaching for the big camera, I reached for the smartphone. With my volume off, I quickly knelt down and fired off a couple of shots without them hearing me or noticing what I was doing. The moment was marked forever in my mind…and a series was born.

My epiphany of using a smartphone to keep the moment undisturbed is what breathes life into my couch series. These moments only would have existed in my mind if I had remained stubborn about shooting them with my Nikon when, at the time, my iPhone 3 was sufficient. The less intrusive smartphone kept them in their world and allowed me to document a candid moment.

There's an ordinariness to shooting a series that becomes heartfelt when collected over time. This challenges the concept of life remaining the same in a constantly (instantly!) changing world. The couch, a permanent fixture in our home, can change—hourly, daily or weekly—all depending on how family members gather, their moods, particular body language and the light of day.

Look around your home or around your neighborhood to find where people gather. It might be the hill where kites are flown in spring, sleds are carried in winter and people picnic in summer. The hill can become your series. It's the stage that remains the same while people gather and seasons change. In your home, it might be the couch or the kitchen table. A family series might reveal itself at the rock wall near the edge of the garden where the kids play or it might be the garage door basketball hoop with a driveway full of bicycles and an ever-changing cast of characters.

Over the past five years, my photography has grown with the technology of my smartphone. I appreciate the availability of my smartphone and how it allowed me to document those early years of blended family. And I cherish those low-resolution (and sometimes heavily filtered) images from the early days of making images with a phone. What a novel idea that used to be!

There are many different apps to choose from, and everyone has a favorite. I shoot mainly with my native camera, or if I want to gain more control over my lighting, I'll shoot in Camera+. This app allows me to control my focus, as well as my aperture. Make sure your settings are set for high (or "pro") quality to ensure the highest-resolution image possible. For postprocessing, I use VSCO for slight adjustments like straightening, sharpening or turning an image to black-and-white. Be mindful of apps that reduce resolution or size in postprocessing. This is important if you want to print your photos for your home or photo album.

Looking over my couch series as a whole is like looking back through time. Through the years and generations of my iPhone, I've created a documentary of where we started, how life changed, the pets we've loved and the children quickly growing into teenagers. In five years, our couch evolved twice and our house remodel eventually repositioned the living room altogether. Now I silently climb into our loft to shoot the couch from above, with a bird's-eye view of the living room. It's the same, but different. A new series, perhaps?

Try shooting a series over time. Is there a place that calls to you? Think outside the box and seek out a space you can use like a backdrop, and then simply wait for the players to take the stage. DP

***MEREDITH WINN*** *is a writer, a photographer and Associate Editor of Taproot Magazine. She's a contributor to Shutter Sisters, featured in our Point of Focus column. Visit* ***meredithwinn.com.***

## CREATING YOUR OWN SERIES

1. **Look for a space to become your backdrop.** Where does your family most often gather together? Watch and listen, then show up with your eye.
2. **Moments caught candidly will reveal a glimpse into the center of family.** Posed family portraits are being replaced with lifestyle photography.
3. **Get enough space in the frame to let a bit of your environment tell your story.** Is your home decorated for the holidays or a birthday? Are the windows open in springtime?
4. **Once you're familiar with your scene, you'll find the best angle to shoot.** Keep images consistently framed to give your series a cohesive feeling.
5. **Shooting the same scene repeatedly may sound boring,** but shooting what you love will result in a treasured collection.
6. **Try using your smartphone to capture the scene with minimal disruption.** Its megapixels are similar or equal to those in most DSLRs.
7. **Allow yourself some freedom to play!**

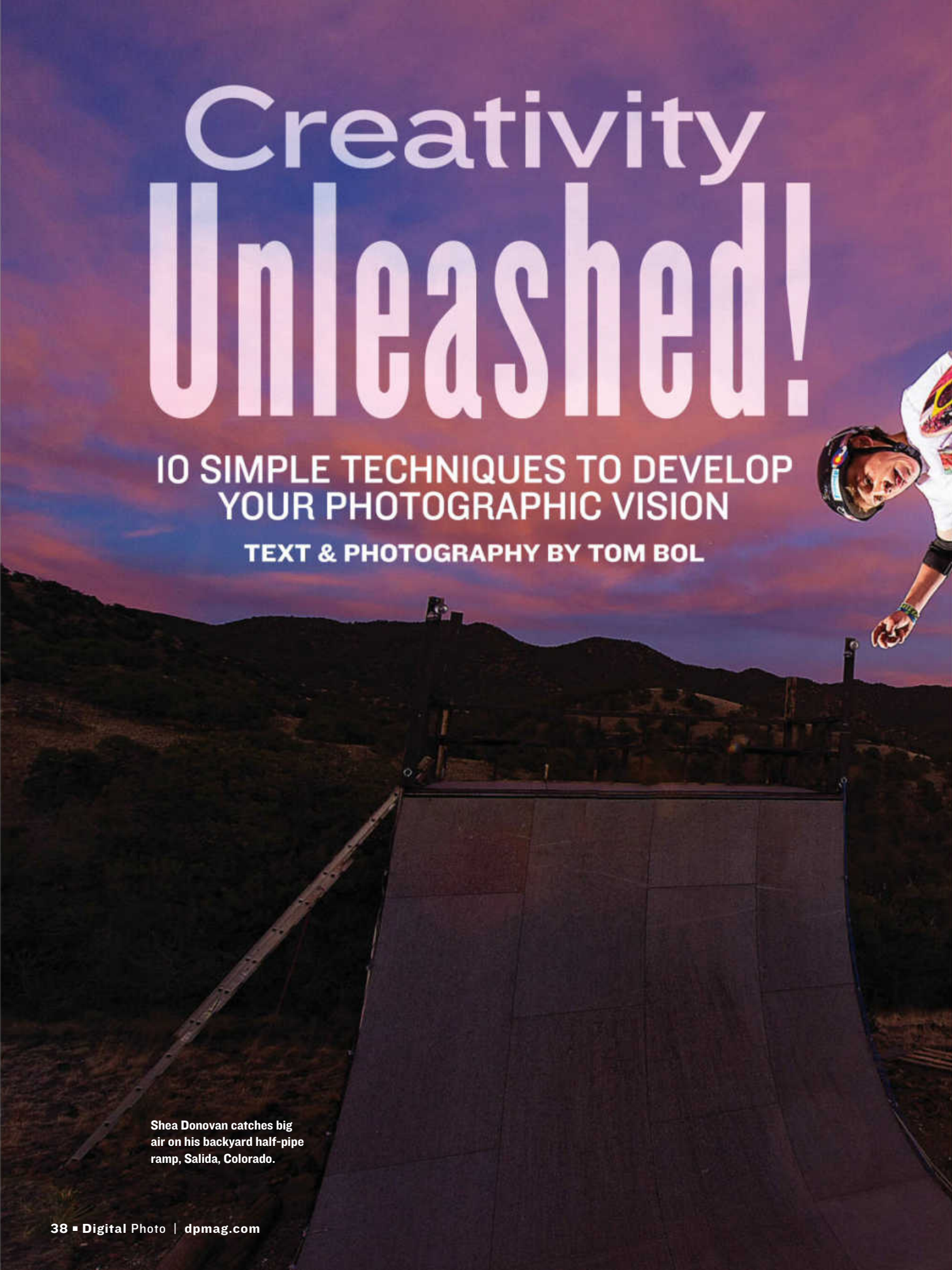




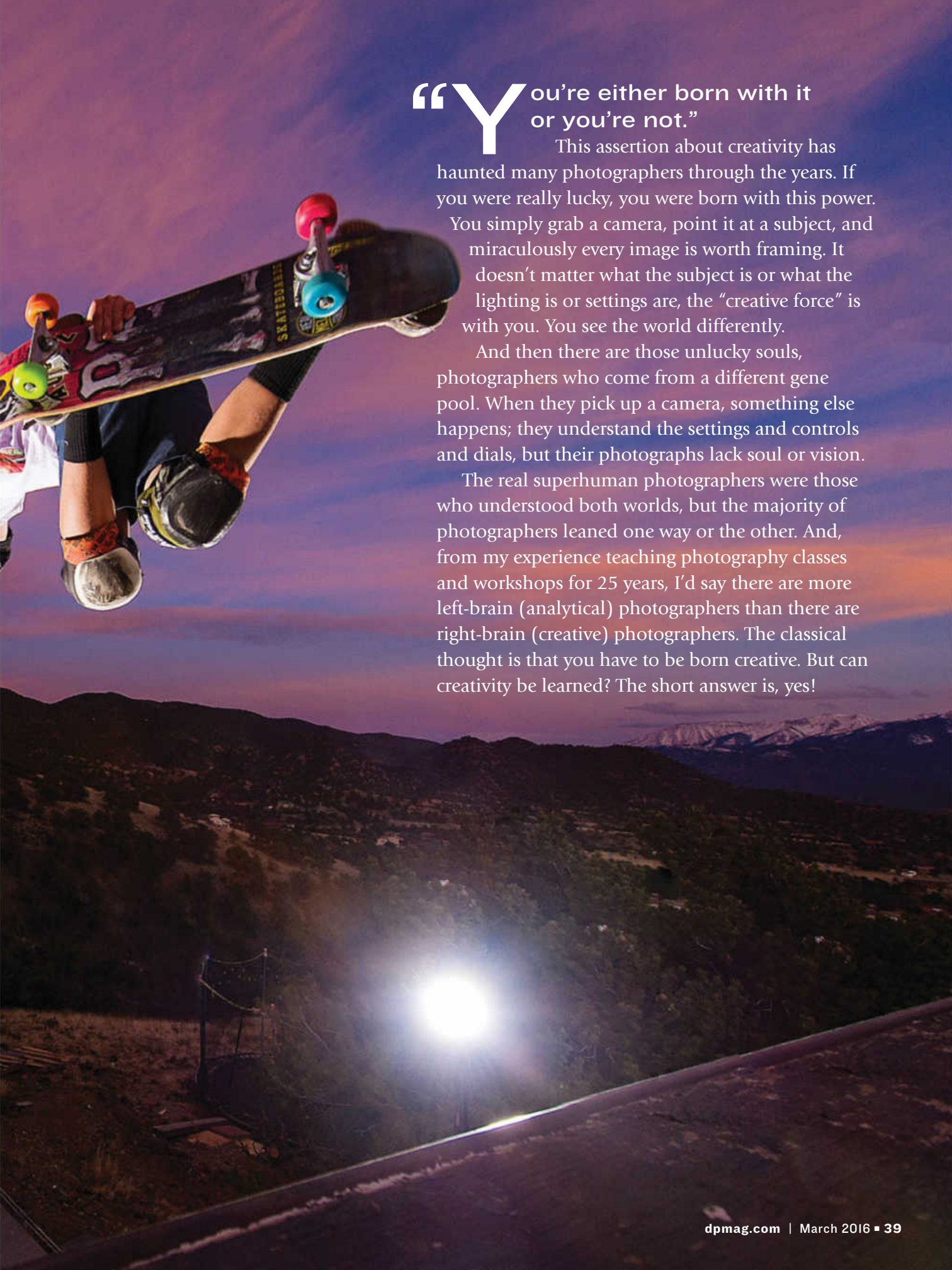
# Creativity Unleashed!

## 10 SIMPLE TECHNIQUES TO DEVELOP YOUR PHOTOGRAPHIC VISION

**TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY TOM BOL**



Shea Donovan catches big air on his backyard half-pipe ramp, Salida, Colorado.



## "You're either born with it or you're not."

This assertion about creativity has haunted many photographers through the years. If you were really lucky, you were born with this power. You simply grab a camera, point it at a subject, and miraculously every image is worth framing. It doesn't matter what the subject is or what the lighting is or settings are, the "creative force" is with you. You see the world differently.

And then there are those unlucky souls, photographers who come from a different gene pool. When they pick up a camera, something else happens; they understand the settings and controls and dials, but their photographs lack soul or vision.

The real superhuman photographers were those who understood both worlds, but the majority of photographers leaned one way or the other. And, from my experience teaching photography classes and workshops for 25 years, I'd say there are more left-brain (analytical) photographers than there are right-brain (creative) photographers. The classical thought is that you have to be born creative. But can creativity be learned? The short answer is, yes!

No matter who you are, creativity can be fostered and learned. You just need to let it out. By practicing new photographic techniques, learning graphic design concepts and seeing the world in a different way, your creativity will develop. Everyone's vision is unique and valuable. You bring your own photographic sense to an image, and this is your creative strength.

Below are some tangible techniques that should give you quick results, and the next time you take pictures, you should get more creative results. The good news is that you can go to your local park and work on developing your photographic creativity. You just need to get out and shoot!



Towering redwoods in the Mariposa Grove, Yosemite National Park, California.

### 1. THINK GRAPHICALLY, NOT LITERALLY

This is probably one of the most important steps you can take to "see outside the box." It's harder than it sounds. When you're photographing a subject, ask yourself what are the strong graphic elements you want to highlight. Take, for instance, a beautiful grove of redwood trees in Yosemite. The trees are huge, the bark is deeply furrowed, and the texture is gritty. The literal, left-brain photographer likely will try to show the entire tree in his or her image. But what's really interesting may just be the cross section of tree trunks. The strong graphic element, and more creative composition, is the midsection of the trees. You don't have to show the whole subject, just include what's visually interesting. Claude Monet summed it up: "In order to see we must forget the name of everything. By labeling, we recognize everything, but no longer see anything."

### 2. FIND A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

Your camera can only take pictures of where you point it. In other words, your camera sees objectively, but you see subjectively. In order to expand your creativity, you need to find fresh perspectives. Be wary of always shooting at eye-level. Tripods are a valuable tool in photography, but don't plant your tripod and then stay fixed to it. Think about what perspective will catch the viewer's attention.

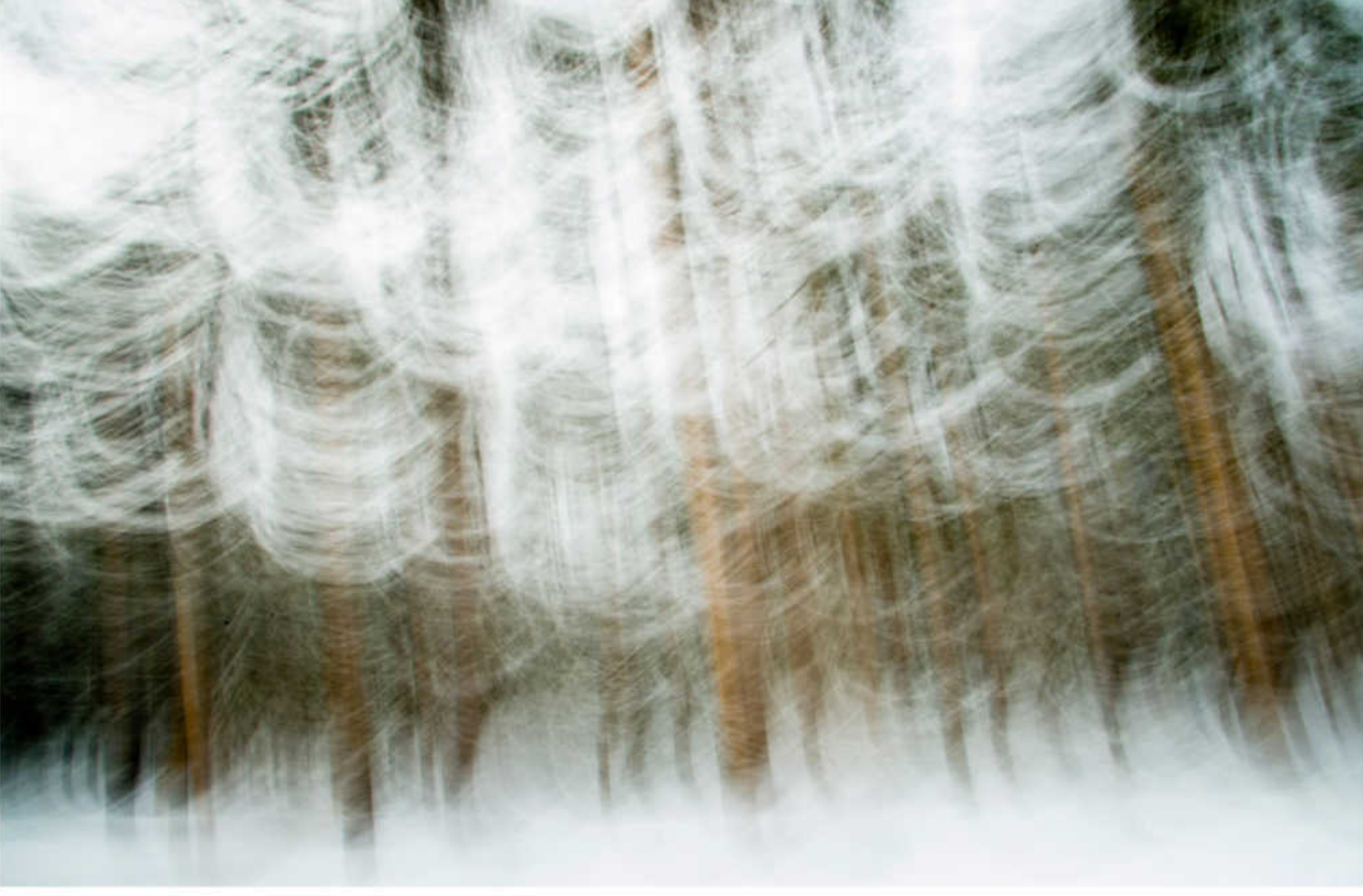
I was in Croatia recently and found numerous locals walking their dogs in the street. Rather than just take a snapshot of the dog and owner, I got down on the street and photographed the pair at dog-eye-level. This perspective was fresh, creative and eye-catching. When you see the world in a different way, your creativity is expanding. Watch how kids respond to you when you crouch down to their level. You're engaging them from a kid's perspective, and they will be more open to you, and your images will convey this feeling. You're not a spectator, but a participant in their world.



**LEFT:** A man walking his dog near an outdoor cafe, Hvar, Croatia.

### 3. USE A 50MM LENS ALL WEEK

If you want to frustrate college photography students, tell them they can only use their 50mm lens for a week of shooting. I first endured this "punishment" as a journalism student, and later subjected my students to the same exercise. Why? Using one lens forces you to photograph differently and increases your creative awareness. Photographers have to approach portrait subjects closely or walk far away to capture wide-angle landscapes. Moving is a good thing in photography and will result in more creative



Lodgepole pine forest along the Madison River, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming.

shots. Remember, moving your distance to a subject, instead of just zooming in, will change background relationships and bokeh (the quality of the blur in the background) in an image.

### 4. TRY SOMETHING ABSTRACT

I remember teaching a workshop near Ouray, Colorado, photographing fall aspens. We arrived at a beautiful yellow aspen grove and discovered another workshop photographing the same trees. This group was shooting from tripods and using excellent technique. My group got out of their cars, and started shaking their cameras and shooting at very slow shutter speeds. It looked like a cult gathering in the woods—people laughing and spinning their cameras in circles. I know for a fact that I'll never see a photographer from the other group on one of my workshops—they thought we were crazy! But what we were really doing was shooting "shakies," spinners and multiple exposures to create abstract images. This may seem really foreign to many photographers, but that's the point! The process is more important than the end result. Try something new: You may just get an image you really like, and your creativity will flourish.

### 5. BECOME A LIGHT ROMANTIC

Light is necessary for all photography. The more you understand the characteristics (quality, direction and color) of light and the nuances of shadow, the better your images will become. Landscape photographers get up at truly brutal times of the day to photograph scenic environments at first light. Why? The beautiful, warm orange light invites the viewer into the image; the light is pleasing. Portrait photographers are on a career-long journey experimenting with artificial light, seeking out the right light to photograph the subject. Creativity hinges on using light effectively. If you have a really creative shot captured in flat, boring light, then your image won't have much impact. But capture the same scene in stunning light, and your shot will win photo contests.

### 6. THINK IN LAYERS AND DIMENSIONS

We live in a three-dimensional world, yet we photograph scenes using a two-dimensional medium. To create the appearance of three dimensions, we need to photograph scenes with layers and shadow. Think about how you can photograph a scene with layers. I once was teaching a workshop in Scotland, and we were photographing rusty old boats stranded on a rocky beach. The obvious shot was photographing the boats from eye-level and recording the scene. This was a nice image, but I wanted to add dimension and more interest to the image. I noticed a very small patch of green grass about a foot tall, no more than the size of a welcome mat on your front doorstep. I laid down in the dirt, focused through the grass at the ships and took the image. This image was much more compelling, and



**THIS PAGE:** Mandy Fabel rock climbing in Sinks Canyon State Park, Lander, Wyoming.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The boot view of a hiker resting under Wilson Arch, near Moab, Utah.



had more dimension and a fresh perspective, to boot.

### 7. USE A FLASH

Hand in hand with creating dimension in your images is using a flash. Many photographers are resistant to using flash. But, remember, to develop your creativity, you need to try different techniques. Modern speedlights are very easy to use, and can be used off-camera for stunning effects. Try adding a little accent light to your macro flower photography or using fill-flash for travel portraits. I love to shoot travel portraits using a single off-camera flash. Using the flash at an angle to my subject creates shadow and mood. Whatever is flashed in your image attracts the viewer's attention and gives you creative control on emphasizing subjects. Remember this lighting axiom: Light illuminates the subject, but shadow gives it depth and dimension.

### 8. PERFORM THE TOP-40 TEST

A great exercise to identify your creative strengths and weaknesses is to review your own work. Choose your 40 best (or favorite) images, and write down what makes them good. Is it composition, subject matter, lens choice or maybe lighting? Common photographic traits in these images are the things you do well. To develop your creativity, you need to do something different than what you're already doing. I've photographed rock climbing my entire career and know how to get a nice available light image. But I was in a rut. How many times can I shoot climbers from the same angle using the same lens? Six years ago, I decided to try something new. Instead of using available light, I rigged strobes on the side of the cliff to use portrait cross-lighting to photograph climbers. The result: I got some of my most creative climbing images. I was doing something different, and my creative growth was tangible.

### 9. CREATE MOOD

Photographers often tend to focus on subject matter, but lose sight of the bigger image concept. Ask yourself, why are you really taking this picture? An important aspect to consider is what mood or feeling is present in the scene. Is it the joy of a child playing in the street? Or, maybe it's an intimate moment between a sow grizzly and her cub. Trying to capture mood and emotion will steer your photography in new creative directions. And powerful emotions always tug at the heart of a viewer and make compelling photographs.

### 10. HAVE A PERSONAL PROJECT

Let's face it, you do your best work photographing subjects you're passionate about. If you're a professional, then photographing a personal project lets your creativity go wild. There are no clients to please. You photograph on a whim and are more open to trying new techniques. Personal projects will infuse


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your other photography with new creative approaches, and your personal style will develop. Remember this saying: You don't find your style, your style finds you. And, for many photographers, finding style is achieved through photographing personal projects.

### THERE ARE A HUNDRED REASONS NOT TO DO IT

Probably the biggest hurdle for photographers in developing their creativity is… themselves. We always can come up with a reason not to shoot or try a new technique. Some of my favorites: The weather is nasty; I can't sell this image; It doesn't make sense; That's not how I learned to do it; I'm shy; I don't have the time—the list is endless! Simply put, the more you shoot, the more your creativity will evolve.

Truth be told, I was never comfortable with photographers discussing their craft. It always sounded like a foreign language. I secretly was wishing I was born with that creative gene.

But my excitement for photography overruled my apprehension of being creatively challenged. For me, seeing new images after a trip is like opening presents on Christmas Day. I get so excited that I'm almost shaking with anticipation. Maybe just a few images are more creative than anything else I've photographed before. Who knows, this trip just may be the one where my creativity enters a new realm. DP

*You can see more of Tom Bol's photography at tombolphoto.com.*



**OPPOSITE PAGE:** Snorkelers Laura and Morgan Zann, the Virgin Islands.

**ABOVE:** Two grizzly cubs play on the tidal flats after digging for clams, Lake Clark National Park, Alaska.

**BELOW:** Two old ships beached on the shores of Salen Bay, Isle of Mull, Scotland.





# FOCUS ON THE DETAILS

## CREATE UNIQUE IMAGES OF THE NATURAL WORLD USING YOUR SMARTPHONE

**TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY MEREDITH WINN**

Photography is a powerful tool. We wield our cameras with the possibility to share a different perspective of the world. In this day of instant *everything*, I find myself taking a majority of daily photos with my smartphone. This little device has become a great resource for documentation, and it often acts as a lifeline for keeping me present in the moment as an everyday photographer. It's so convenient, always in my pocket and inconspicuous while in use. I'm still loyal to my "real" camera gear, but most days I swing toward the lightheartedness and ease of the iPhone.











Focusing on the details of nature really helps to create an optical illusion of space in my photography. Belly down in the wet grass with fog and rain all around, I look for a certain *smallness* that reminds me of childhood imagination. Mushrooms found on a dewy morning, conversing with butterflies and toads, even a resting raindrop, all have the potential to become an interesting (and perhaps challenging) subject. Working within creative restraints can be frustrating. So when I walk away from these photography moments muddy-kneed and happy, it's not because of shutter speed and lens size, but because what I'm really doing is connecting with nature and meditating with my camera.

I gain more control over my focal point by using the Camera+ app. A shallow depth of field will change any snapshot into a more visually pleasing image.



How can looking through our cameras teach us more about light and life, and how to merge it all into a beautiful photographic package? Balance is the feeling your photograph evokes. Balance is what makes images look and feel harmonious (and, no, not always symmetrical, and, yes, you can break the rules). Balance, composition, space and light: Each one of these elements of photography has a certain amount of value in direct relation to all the other elements. They're all connected.

Without them, the image loses its emotion, the subject falls off the page, the viewer loses interest of the subject or the moment has passed. All of this swirls around my brain as I look at this tiny mushroom and wonder, "How do I photograph a single blade of grass, the dew on a small mushroom or the expanse of fog surrounding me?"

I start by getting grounded. This helps me find balance and breathe. Most often, I look down right where I'm standing and get small; I crouch low and gather up my surroundings, one tiny detail at a time.

### GET SMALL

Yes, I always smile and think of Steve Martin (circa the 1970s) telling his audiences, "I like to get *small*." But this motto actually works well with photography.



**RIGHT:** Get closer! Composing your bokeh background will help accentuate your subject. I intentionally positioned these raindrops against the dark green bokeh pine trees to help the individual drops stand out.

**BELOW:** Get low! Kneel down and risk getting muddy knees for your shot. By placing my iPhone lens lowest to the ground, I'm able to focus on details of the grass and mushroom from an ant's perspective.

**BELOW, RIGHT:** Look up! Use a clear sky to clean up your composition with space and light. For this shot, I got low and then angled my camera up the flower stem to position the sun behind the petals.







Get low. And then get lower. Placing your iPhone (with the camera lens side) to the ground will include more details in the frame of your image. Blades of grass stand front and center, and fungi grow to gigantic proportions with this ant's-eye view that humans normally don't see.

### WEATHER

Seek out variations in weather. Fog is your friend! Use this opportunity to shoot a full landscape to capture the white space of fog. The details of this scene become the color of the tree, the power lines at the edge of the frame and the frost heaves in the cracked road. Don't run from rain! Grab an umbrella and head out to find raindrops and puddles.

When I first began shooting with my smartphone, it left me inspired with creativity.

### FOCUS

I gain more control over my focal point by using the Camera+ app. A shallow depth of field will change any snapshot into a more visually pleasing image. Try Camera+ or look for a photography app that allows you to retain full resolution of your files. There are many to choose from, and you're guaranteed to find a favorite just as I did. Each of these images was shot in Camera+ specifically for its manual-control feature. Camera+ allows me to create a crisp focal point on raindrops while simultaneously creating a bokeh background of forest.

### COMPOSITION

Tricking the eye to find details hiding in something ordinary is another fun way to shoot landscapes or nature scenes. I gravitate toward reflections for this sort of optical illusion. Shooting reflections in puddles or still ponds can create an image that feels otherworldly. The detail becomes not just yet another image of fall foliage, but a ripple in still water or the shape and texture of a puddle on concrete with a dream of autumn hidden inside.

### BACKLIGHTING

Being able to control exposure definitely adds to the mood and overall feel of your image. Camera+ allows for this type of manual control. Backlighting flowers, leaves and petals can reveal an extra-fine sharpness to your iPhone image, as well as provide strong emotion. This is different than creating sun flare (which is also fun); backlight creates a glowing halo effect that feels heavenly on the eyes.

### CREATE A NATURAL LIGHT STUDIO

When my son was little, we called it "treasure hunting," a nature walk that resulted in handfuls of acorns, interesting leaves, shiny rocks and other goodies found outside. Shooting the details of leaf veins or a well-placed heart-shaped hole is a welcome practice in composition, but also a good study in natural light. By placing your "treasures" on a black backdrop near a window, the natural light will aid in showcasing the beauty of the found object. The natural light of a window is best known for portraits, but works beautifully for still-life photography, as well. My windowsills are commonly used as tiny natural light studios for treasures found in nature.

### WHO KNEW MOBILE PHOTOGRAPHY COULD BE SO FUN?

When I first began shooting with my smartphone, it left me inspired with creativity. My innate desire to make something beautiful met new parameters with which to create. This was exactly the challenge I needed, and I still find it fun (and instantly satisfying)! Some days, I shoot exclusively with my smartphone, and quite honestly, it's a freeing experience. Gain creative control over your mobile images, and have more success and fun with your phone the next time you get out in nature. DP

*Meredith Winn is a writer, a photographer and Associate Editor of Taproot Magazine. She's a contributor to Shutter Sisters, featured in our Point of Focus column. You can see more of her photography at meredithwinn.com.*

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# UPGRADING YOUR GEAR




▼ CANON EOS 5DS

## TO UPGRADE YOUR PHOTOGRAPHY START BY UPGRADING YOUR EQUIPMENT | BY ELLIS VENER

While it's true that most people turn to their phones and mobile devices for their daily snapshots, the popularity of camera phones has sparked a vigorous nonstop evolution and proliferation of advanced amateur and professional gear. As masses of people embrace photography as part of their daily lives, it seems to be motivating large numbers to pursue photography as a hobby and an art.

Photography is a "gear" art form—it takes more money to get seriously into photography than to, say, get seriously into watercolor painting. First, you dip your toes in the water with a new camera and a new lens, and then suddenly there's the constant desire to upgrade. Will a new camera, a new lens, a new tripod help you take better images? There are few photographers I know who don't wonder what it would be like to shoot with the latest, fanciest, most expensive gear.

It's not the gear that makes the photographer, however. No gadget or gizmo is going to improve someone's vision or compositional skills. But a better lens might allow a photographer to capture an image in lower light or with a less distracted background.

Here's a guide to some areas in which a bit of gear upgrading goes a long way.




◀ NIKON D500

## CAMERAS

Ever since digital cameras first became commercially available, there has been a continued increase in their capabilities combined with a decrease in the price you pay for those capabilities. There have been increases not only in resolution, but also in dynamic range, internal processor capabilities, high ISO performance, autofocusing and more. That means if you're shooting with a camera that's five or more years old, you can see tremendous benefits with an upgrade.




Consider the following when deciding if it's time to upgrade your cameras.

**RESOLUTION.** For most photographers, it's foolish to think about getting a camera with less than around 24 megapixels, maybe even 30 megapixels. That's because it's not just about how large you can possibly print, but also about capturing finer detail and about being able to crop and still have a decent size file when you go to print.

**DYNAMIC RANGE AND HIGH ISO.** The range of *f*-stops between the lightest and the darkest a camera can capture is called dynamic range. High-end cameras can capture around 12 stops of dynamic range. The more pixels on the sensor, usually the lower the dynamic range, especially as ISO increases. This is an area where there has been dramatic improvement in recent years, and it's one of the main reasons to upgrade camera gear. If your camera produces grainy low-quality images at ISOs above 1600, a newer camera could be your ticket to better low-light image quality.




▲ SONY a7R II

**AUTOFOCUS.** Although some aspects of autofocus design have been pushed to the limits in modern camera and lens design, we've seen a marked improvement in autofocus in the last few years, especially in low light. Some mirrorless cameras even have given us the ability to perform eye-detection focus in continual focus, at all times. Face-detection systems are going to get smarter and more accurate, but if your camera has trouble telling a face from a flower, it's time to look at a camera with better autofocus.

▼ OLYMPUS OM-D E-M5 MARK II




## LENSES

Lenses are steadily getting better, too. It used to be that the lenses made by the camera manufacturers themselves provided the necessary optical quality, mechanical performance and reliability over time that photographers crave. In 2016, that's no longer true. Sigma and Tamron—the biggest third-party lens makers—are making superlative lenses for most DSLR and mirrorless cameras, and in some cases, at better price points than the camera makers do. Even rising companies like Rokinon are producing some top-end lenses.

The best lens isn't always the one with the largest aperture or highest price tag, but those are generally good barometers. A very important consideration is the amount of geometric distortion in the lens, in other words, how much the lens incorrectly bends incoming light. Lens reviews, and notably the independent review site DxOMark.com, will list the characteristics of a lens. Because a lens creates distortion doesn't mean it's not worth purchasing; there's always a trade-off between optical quality and cost.

Moderate edge distortion in an affordable lens might be a better value




◀ TAMRON SP 45MM *f*/1.8 Di VC USD

▲ TAMRON SP 35MM *f*/1.8 Di VC USD



▲ SIGMA 18-300MM *f*/3.5-6.3 DC MACRO OS HSM




▲ ROKINON 50MM T/1.5 CINE DS




◀ PHOTTIX MITROS+




▲ POCKETWIZARD PLUS IV



▲ METZ MECABLITZ 44 AF-2 DIGITAL

than slight distortion in an extremely expensive lens, if you know how to compose your images accordingly (and if you can't afford the expensive lens).

## CAMERA SUPPORT

If you're a landscape or a working photographer, a tripod is a necessity, but a flimsily made tripod is worse than not having one at all, because it will always let you down. A good-quality tripod and head combination does one thing, and it does it very well: It supports your camera and keeps it pointing where you point it.

Consider the following factors:

**BUILD QUALITY.** Tripods aren't something you want to have to replace every few years, so it's worth investing in a high-quality tripod.

**HEIGHT.** Have someone measure your standing height up to your eye level and then add the height of the tripod with the legs fully extended (but not the center column), plus the head (more about that in a minute), plus your current camera. This combination should, at minimum, bring your camera's viewfinder up to your eye level without your needing to stoop.

**THE ABILITY TO SPREAD THE LEGS LOW TO THE GROUND, OR IDEALLY, FLAT.** This is useful for working with and around obstacles like boulders and railings.

**NUMBER OF LEG SECTIONS.** With the exception of very tall tripods with large-diameter legs, limit this to a total of three. By the time you extend a fourth section, the entire setup is more prone to flexing.




◀ VANGUARD VEO



◀ REALLY RIGHT STUFF TVC-33



▲ ARCA-SWISS MONOBALL Z



◀ REALLY RIGHT STUFF BH-55

**ALUMINUM, CARBON-FIBER OR WOOD?** If you'll be hiking a lot or doing a lot of air travel, the extra expense of a high-quality carbon-fiber tripod is definitely worth it.

**CENTER COLUMN OR NO CENTER COLUMN?** Purists will argue that tripods with center columns are less stable than those without. I've tried it both ways, and with tripods that allow me to interchange the center section of the crown, I've concluded that if the tripod itself is stable, the versatility of having a center column to use when you absolutely need it outweighs the possible downside.

**SUPPORTED WEIGHT.** To be on the safe side when looking at a tripod manufacturer's specs, take the combined weight of the largest camera and lens combination you're likely to use and multiply it by a factor of 1.5X. There's little sense in paying for and lugging around a tripod and head designed to support a Canon EOS-1D X and an EF 800mm ƒ/5.6L lens if you're never going to use that heavy a combination.

## TRIPOD HEADS

There are two basic types of tripod heads most people will consider, ball and double-tilt designs. Almost all have a panning movement at their base, but there's a growing trend, driven by the practice of shooting overlapping frames to create very high-resolution stitched panoramas, for heads to have either a single panning movement at the camera platform or panning movements at the base and camera platform levels. I prefer having panning at both the base and the camera platform, and if that isn't an option with the head as it comes from the dealer, I add one.

Whichever head style you think works best for you, the one criterion that's absolute is that as you lock the head down, the lens remains pointing where you pointed it.

Other specialty tripod head types include video heads and gimbal heads. When shopping for a video head, look for one with fluid-damped tilt and panning movements. You also want a head that starts and stops smoothly. Beyond shooting video, high-quality, high-load video heads do a superb job of supporting long, front-heavy, fast-aperture supertelephoto lenses.

As for quick-release, it has taken about 30 years, but the QR plate and clamp design pioneered by Arca-Swiss has become pretty much the de facto standard in quick-release technology.

## LIGHTING

I'm a big believer in available light photography. That's to say, I'm happy to use any light I have available to use.

In the category of TTL (aka "smart flash")-controlled, hot-shoe-mount flash, there are a number of new brands offering Canon-, Nikon- and in some cases Sony-compatible models. The cost difference between a new camera maker's smart flash and a non-camera-brand version can be substantial. The Phottix Mitros, Yongnuo YN and Godox are good alternatives to add to your tool pool.

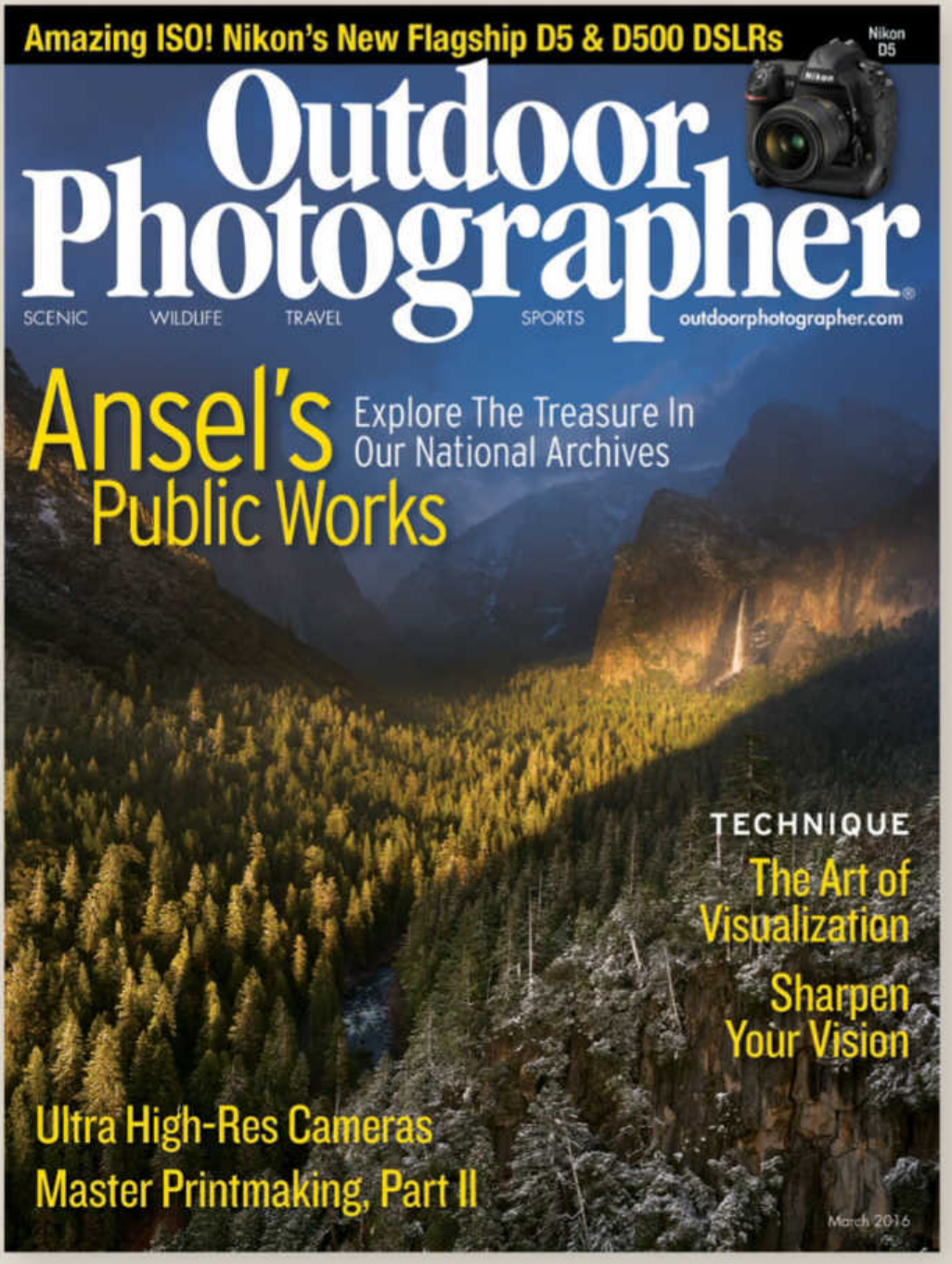
2016 is already shaping up as the year that TTL-controlled monolights went mainstream. Along with TTL control, these flashes add high shutter speed syncing as an option, as well. DP

*Ellis Vener is an Atlanta-based commercial photographer. You can visit his website at ellisvener.com.*




## IMPROVE THE OUT-OF-THE-BOX RESULT FOR ANY LENS

Because both cameras and lenses are complex independent machines, they're manufactured within a range of tolerances. Combining any lens with any body means, odds are, no two will focus together perfectly straight out of the box, no matter how good the autofocus system is. This means, if you care about image quality, it's worth every second to use your camera's autofocus micro-adjustment controls to tune individual camera bodies to individual lenses. Contrast-based focusing as used in Live View and EVF cameras is still better than the phase-based autofocusing needed for DSLR shooting, but even Sony a7 cameras have autofocus micro-adjustment controls, and tuning your camera's AF systems to your lenses is well worth the time and tedium required. While there are several off-the-shelf systems, and you even can rig up a DIY target, over the years, I've found that the **Michael Tapes Design LensAlign target used with FocusTune analysis software** yields the most reliable and consistent results.




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SONY

# CYBER-SHOT DSC-RX1R II

## FROM TRAVEL PORTRAITS TO LOW-LIGHT STREET PHOTOGRAPHY, THIS FULL-FRAME, 42+-MEGAPIXEL CAMERA DELIVERS EXCELLENT IMAGE QUALITY IN A COMPACT PACKAGE

**TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID SCHLOSS**

The high-end compact digital camera has always lived an uneasy existence. Nestled awkwardly between affordable, entry-level point-and-shoots and expensive "pro" cameras, the high-end compact camera has tried to be a little bit of both—light enough to go anywhere, good enough image quality not to regret leaving the SLR gear at home.

In the triad of attributes for the high-end digital compact—small size, high quality, low price—it's possible to pick only two. Different companies have tried different mixes with different variations, but in the end, high-end compact cameras are generally pricey, with professional-esque features, and slightly bulky.

This whole market was upended by the mirrorless revolution. Most compact digital cameras are based around a teeny 1-inch sensor while the pioneering mirrorless system, Micro Four Thirds, uses a sensor that's a good deal larger. Olympus and Panasonic managed to make bodies with interchangeable lenses that weren't much bigger than the largest compact digital cameras and which offered better image quality.

Still, the compact camera has its allure, and every company has their version of them. Sony has a few compact cameras, the venerable and well-regarded RX100 line (based around a 1-inch sensor) and the RX1R camera line, which uses a full-frame (aka 35mm) sensor.

Photographically speaking, that is a pretty big deal, as a full-frame sensor provides image quality on par with professional imaging gear, because it's the same thing found in professional imaging gear.

Sony's new Cyber-shot DSC-RX1R II, in fact, uses the same 42.4-megapixel sensor and BIONZ X processor as their new flagship a7R II, an amazing feat considering the body is considerably smaller than the a7R II (and even smaller than the original a7R). It doesn't have the five-axis image stabilization of the a7R II, however, and there's no 4K video recording.

Ordinarily, I wouldn't review a $3,000-plus compact camera in *Digital Photo*, as the price puts it out of the range of the average user, even in a way that the same price on the top-end interchangeable-lens system does not. Since the announcement of the RX1R II, I've received a stream of emails from people asking me if this is "*the camera.*" Enthusiasts and pros are always looking for the one camera to satisfy all needs—light enough to go anywhere, powerful enough to take any photo. Could the RX1R II rule them all?

As with all professional-focused compact digital cameras, I'm both smitten and frustrated with the Sony RX1R II. I love this camera and I hate it at the same time. When I take a portrait that's buttery smooth and sharp at the same time, I love it. When the autofocus



fails to track a moving subject with the same level of skill as the Sony a7R II I've come to know and love, I'm angered.

Make no mistake about it, though, the Sony RX1R II is capable of taking pictures with the same incredible quality as the Sony a7R II, albeit without the flexibility the interchangeable lenses provide to users of the a7R II.

In fact, there are some ways that the RX1R II takes *better* pictures than the a7R II, though it will take some practice to get right. This camera features a variable low-pass filter—an optical filter designed to reduce the chance of moiré in high-resolution sensors, but which does so at the cost of reduced sharpness.

Without getting too deep into the details, moiré is a pattern of banding that happens in digital imaging when repeating lines run together in things like fabrics or buildings where the lines seem to converge. Low-pass filters remove this, but blur everything in the process. The RX1R II has a variable filter for moiré control, so if you're shooting something that has no risk of moiré and could use more sharpness (landscapes or headshots, for instance), just turn it off.




The photos in this review showcase the incredible low-light performance of the Sony RXIR II thanks to the same Sony sensor found in the new flagship a7R II and a fast Zeiss lens.

Digital Photo Hands-On REVIEW

In order to get the processor and imaging sensor of the bigger, wider and heavier a7R II into the smaller, lighter and thinner RX1R body, Sony had to make some compromises. In fact, Sony had to make a lot of them. What they didn't compromise on is the price. As of press time, the RX1R II carries a price tag of about $3,300.

That's understandable—there is *a lot* of technology here in a *very* small package. The question isn't whether the RX1R II is worth the price. Simply from an engineering standpoint, it clearly is, in the same way that Apple's price for laptops and tablets is justified by the magic they perform in order to squeeze so much into such a small package.

The question is, do the compromises in the Sony RX1R II make sense for the travel and/or daily go-anywhere photographer, or do other choices make more sense?




## FORM-FITTING

For the record, I'm incredibly impressed that Sony managed to put the processor and sensor from the a7R II in this camera and not end up with an overheating, sluggish beast. I have tremendous admiration for Sony's engineers, and I appreciate that this camera is, if nothing else, Sony's statement that they can pull off something so impressive.

To put this into context, Canon's PowerShot G5 X, which is their top-end compact digital, has a 1-inch sensor—a sensor that's a fraction of the size of a full-frame sensor—in a body that weighs only 154 grams less and is about an inch and a half smaller in height and width.

If you think of a camera's sensor and processor being like a car's engine and drivetrain (and please don't, this is just to make a point), it's like BMW putting the innards from their top-end M5 into the body of the MINI Cooper, while everyone else is driving a Ford Fiesta.

The larger point, though, is that putting such a large "engine" into such a small "chassis" means that something, or some *things*, has to give. In the Canon G5 X, for instance, there's a 24-100mm lens with an aperture of $f/1.8$-2.8, a built-in flash, a fully articulated LCD screen and an always-available electronic viewfinder.

The Sony has a fixed 35mm lens at $f/2.0$, no flash, an on-lens aperture dial




The small size of the RXIR II allows it to go anywhere, so it was on hand to capture the moment when coffee shop regular Vinnie showed off his new holiday sweater.

and a pop-up viewfinder. That means that the Sony, compared solely to this Canon competitor, has a much more limited set of features. There's no zoom, there's no way to light a scene without a hot-shoe strobe, and the viewfinder isn't always available unless you leave it popped up—thereby extending the overall size of the unit.

Instead of veering into a Sony RX1R II versus Canon G5 X comparison, let me state that I think a direct comparison would be unfair to both systems. While both are compact digital cameras, and both are aimed at a photographer who's looking for portability over flexibility, that's where the similarities end. Canon is targeting the advanced amateur who wants to take a functional camera with them, but can sacrifice some image quality for the ultimate in portability. Sony is targeting the photographer for whom the ultimate image quality is paramount and who's willing to shed features to get that image.

What I want to point out is that Sony has done what Sony has always done—figured out how to take some large technology and put it into an unimaginably small package.

## A BIRD IN THE HAND

There are few portable cameras that feel as good as the RX1R II does in the hand. Aside from my wish for a slightly larger grip on the right edge (which I'm certain will be fulfilled with aftermarket accessories), the RX1R II is one of the most svelte, comfortable, portable cameras I've ever used. If you've used any Sony camera for the last few years, especially the a7 series, you're already familiar with the layout.

The camera inherits the same control layout and menu system of the a7 cameras, for better and for worse. Many people deride Sony for their menu layout. I agree it could be better, but it could be a lot worse, as well.

There are two unique features to the RX1R II relative to the a7 series cameras—three, if you count the fact that the lens is fixed. First is the glaring absence of a full-time viewfinder. The RX1R II viewfinder is housed inside the camera in the same way that most systems (including the RX1R) house a pop-up flash, and it's released and activated by depressing a "Finder" button on the side of the camera. There's an attachment eyecup for the pop-up viewfinder, which is nice, but I'll certainly lose it in my camera bag in a day or two.

If I had any advice for product managers of this camera, it would be to make the camera a bit taller with a full-time viewfinder and give the RX line a pop-up flash. But, of course, the goal of the RX series is to make a very, very small camera for a customer who wants a petite powerhouse, so, again, there are compromises.

The other oft-derided feature on the RX1R camera has carried over to the RX1R II, and that's the on-lens aperture control dial. Like in the days of manual lenses, the aperture for the RX1R II (when shooting in A or M mode) is adjusted via a ring on the lens with *f*-stop numbers printed on the collar. That's a great feature in two-handed shooting situations, but there's no option to allow the rear

control dial to control aperture settings, which means that the camera can't be used in one-handed shooting and still change the aperture.

Aside from those issues, the RX1R II is so small and light that it's easy to forget there's a top-end 42-megapixel BSI sensor in there. And that's the point. The small size and unassuming nature of the camera makes it theoretically one of the best street cameras ever made. There's nothing about this camera that looks like it can take an image that's capable of running on a billboard, and someone wielding it on the streets of Times Square looks for all the world like a tourist.

I know photographers who have been kicked out of stadiums and national parks for shooting with cameras that have much smaller sensors and lower resolving power than this, because they seemed to be "commercial" photographers.

## CHOICE LENS

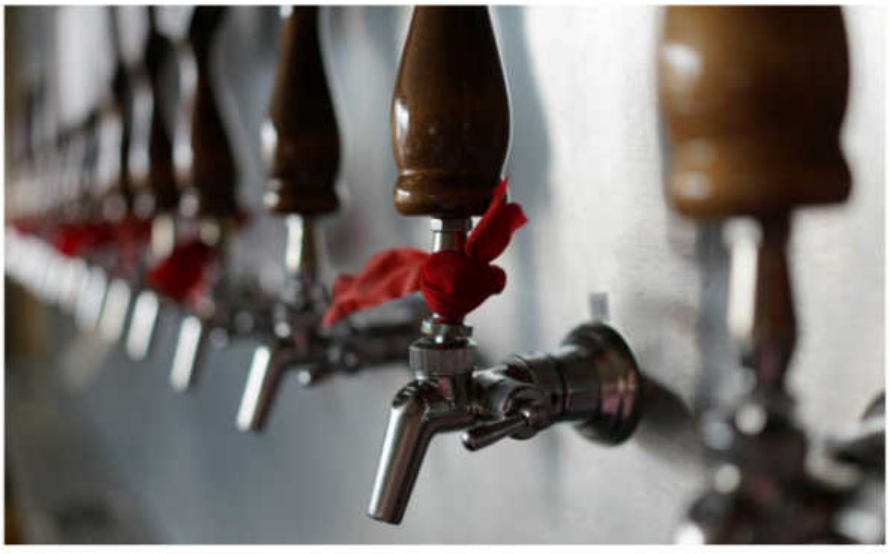
The Sony RX1R II lens is the exact same model as found on the RX1R; Sony states that absolutely no changes have been made. That's mostly good, as the Carl Zeiss 35mm $f/2$ is a good lens. It's better than just about anything else on the market on a fixed-lens system. It's not a perfect lens—we found some barrel distortion at the edges that's rather noticeable, but is correctable in software.

Personally, I wish it had a bit softer of a background "bokeh" smoothness and was a bit wider. When doing street photography, I like to get more of a scene in the background for context, and when doing portraits, I don't mind getting closer to my subjects.

I also personally wish the lens was a bit wider—28mm is my go-to lens for travel and street photography, as it's wide enough for landscapes, but still close enough for a good portrait without too much distortion. Still, that's a personal choice.

## OPTICAL QUALITY

Aside from the issues introduced by the lens (slight barrel distortion and focus blur that's not as dreamy as a bigger, more complex lens), the optical quality on the RX1R II is excellent, and I'd go so far as to say it's incredible. It's on par with that from the a7R II in all regards, which isn't surprising, with the same sensor and processor.



The bottles on page 59 and these taps were photographed by the dim light of a bar's window in the early morning before opening. The BSI sensor in the RXIR II performs especially well in low light.

That means this camera is the go-to travel camera for portraits and the best camera on the market right now for low-light photography. It's possible to handhold landscape or night city shots at ISO 6400 or 12800 with levels of noise several stops lower. Couple the RX1R II with a tripod, and the results are breathtaking at night.

And that makes the camera very versatile in a number of situations where other travel cameras typically fall flat.

## THE CHOSEN

Is the Sony RX1R II the one perfect camera? The answer is probably not, but it depends. It certainly produces the best-looking images in a body this small, especially in low light, and it's the best choice in a full-frame camera that's innocuous enough to get past the scrutiny of a local concert security guard or an international pickpocket.

There are absolutely better values for the money, but that's not the point. Sony has created a technological marvel that's a proof-of-concept come to life. It's a display of the company's industrial design prowess that also happens to be available to the general public.

If you're taking a once-in-a-lifetime trip to a foreign land and you want the best possible image quality and want to sacrifice lens selection for compact discretion, this is the perfect camera. DP

*You can follow David Schloss on Twitter and Instagram @davidjschloss.*



# IN AN ERA OF AUTOMATED HOMES AND SMARTPHONES, WHY ARE OUR CAMERAS SO DUMB?

BY DAVID SCHLOSS

When my iPhone wakes me with a gentle alarm in the morning, it also sends a signal to my thermostat to turn up the temperature downstairs and instructs my coffee pot to start brewing some hot, black coffee. The LED light bulbs in the room slowly brighten and change hue as I adjust to the morning.

When I leave for work, my iPhone, sensing me leaving the driveway, tells my house to lock my doors, drop the temperature, turn off the lights and close my blinds. My house checks the weather forecast on the Internet, and since it's going to be a hot, sunny day, my lawn sprinklers are activated in order to water my lawn before the sun heats things too much. My washing machine checks the energy rates and starts a wash cycle while electricity prices are low.

Arriving at my desk, I want to take some of the photos on my camera and send them to friends. Surely, in an era where my phone, house and even my appliances are constantly connected to each other, it should be easy to get pictures off the camera, but instead, it's a physical process that involves plugging in the camera or putting a card in a reader, copying files to the computer and then using some other software to get them to a myriad of different services.

Working in the field is even worse. Trying to connect strobes requires a bag full of cables and transmitters, none of which talk to each other. Want to trigger a PocketWizard-compatible Dynalite with nothing but an Elinchrom Skyport controller? You're out of luck.

The "Internet of Things" is coming, a term that refers to the addition of wireless communications to everyday objects, allowing them to talk to each other and improve our lives by sharing data. Appliance manufacturers are working hard to make our toasters and our cars and our air conditioners work with each other, so why are our cameras—which essentially are portable computers—so far behind our major appliances? What would camera companies—and the computer and accessory companies they work with—need to do to usher in a new era of the *connected camera?*

Luckily, I've been fuming over the gaps in camera technology in photography for decades, so I have some suggestions.

CAMERA 21




## STANDARD BEARERS

First, let's look at the various standards that may or may not be found in a camera you buy today.

There are several primary connectivity standards in use today—some wired and some wireless—and they're familiar to anyone with a mobile phone or computer.

On the wireless front, there are WiFi and Bluetooth, both with various different flavors of each, mostly that determine data transfer speeds. Typical wired connections include USB, Ethernet, HDMI and Thunderbolt. Again, each has different versions of the standard, often with different types of connectors.

USB is most often found in the older, slower USB 2.0 standard. Only higher-end cameras have USB 3.0, and then there are several different connectors one might encounter. Ethernet is found on some pro cameras; Thunderbolt has yet to arrive on pro cameras and is only on one video camera.

WiFi comes in different speed standards from the original consumer 802.11b (up to 11 Mb/sec.) to the current 802.11ac (up to 780 Mb/sec.). Bluetooth is up to Version 4.0—much faster than previous versions. There's also a low-energy version of Bluetooth used by things like the Apple Watch (part of the Bluetooth 4.0 standard), which allows devices to communicate while using very little battery power.

Then we have a technology called NFC, short for near field communication, which allows for easy setup of data transfer between devices that are close to each other. This is what allows people to buy a Coke at a vending machine simply by tapping their cell phones to it. Several cameras have NFC, but its use isn't widespread in cameras or in computing.

Bluetooth, which is in everything from headsets to phones to watches, is conspicuously absent from cameras. While Bluetooth is slow at data transfer—it tops out at about half the speed of USB 2.0—it's still ubiquitous and would be handy in a world of standards, which I'll talk about below.

And, for geo-location, there's GPS, of course, which is found on every phone on the market, as well as some laptops, but is missing from most cameras.

Look at the camera market and you'll find a strange implementation of these protocols. Many consumer cameras have GPS, and sometimes have WiFi, and they usually have USB 2.0 connectivity. Professional cameras rarely have WiFi or GPS, but usually have USB 3.0 connectivity, and sometimes Ethernet jacks and HDMI.

Of those that do have WiFi, very few use it for direct transmission of images. Usually, the WiFi is constrained to transmission of images from camera to phone or from camera to computer. Capture a photo in the field, and even if you're surrounded by

a high-speed WiFi access point, you usually still have to transfer images to your phone or laptop first.

The HDMI ports are usually used for playback, though a few of the cameras that shoot 4K also use the HDMI for data recording.

Then there's a range of other non-standard communication systems used in photography, as well. There are optical strobe-triggering systems like Nikon's Speedlight system and radio strobe transmission systems like PocketWizard and the Elinchrom Skyport.

Another constraining point is the "operating system" of a camera. You don't really think of it, but the menu system and the operation of a camera is a teeny little operating system like a miniature version of what your Mac or Windows machine runs. When you make a selection in the menus, the camera's central processor changes the way camera input and output are handled.

Every camera manufacturer has their own operating system, and most have different systems in their top-end and their consumer cameras. Not only is there no consistency going from camera model to camera model, but there's no consistency from brand to brand. Imagine switching from a Dell to a Compaq, and the volume on one was controlled from an icon on the top menu bar and on the other by a setting three levels deep in a folder on the desktop.



DXO ONE

Different standards don't just make for difficult learning curves; they make for impossible interoperability between devices. Strobes that work with Nikon's TTL system don't work with Canon's TTL system, for example. This is by design, unfortunately. These companies put a lot of work into their proprietary systems (that's a very good thing), so they don't want to see competitors being able to use their hardware. The unfortunate side effect is that everyone has to buy brand-specific *everything*.

This is what Olympus, Kodak and Panasonic were getting at with the development of their Four Thirds system, an "open" standard that companies could license and use, but for obvious reasons, the major camera manufacturers have a vested interest in *not* cooperating. If you can move seamlessly from one camera system to another, what's to stop you?



▼ NIKON SB-910 AF SPEEDLIGHT

◀ SEKONIC LITEMASTER PRO L-478DR

## AN IDEAL CAMERA WORLD

I've long imagined a camera world that was more along the lines of the world envisioned by Apple's iOS 9 and OS X, or Microsoft's Windows 10, where mobile and desktop devices just work together. Here's what it would look like.

All cameras would have a core level of functionality so that consumers, accessory makers and developers of apps would know that any camera they pick up has a minimum level of interoperability with other devices. For example, the cheapest cameras could all have USB 2.0, WiFi, Bluetooth and GPS, plus conform to the various camera standards for image transfer, lighting and other devices, which I'll outline in a moment.

Cameras would have a core operating system controlled by the manufacturer, but also a user interface that could be customized with themes and different layouts. If a photographer preferred tabbed layouts, it would be possible to put all the camera controls under tabs. If buttons were preferred, everything could be controlled with buttons and pop-out choices. Desktop or mobile apps could be used to select the theme and to drag around the order of the objects.

It also would be helpful here if standards for quick configuration of devices, such as NFC, were adopted more widely on phones and laptops. The iPhone has NFC, but only uses it for Apple Pay. Few laptops have NFC and virtually no desktops. It may not be a big deal to pull out a card and plug it into a reader

(and it's often faster than WiFi), but in the wireless, connected world, it's all about workflow.

Standards would be incredibly important, and they would lead to a new world of accessory sharing and development in the photographic space. Companies would be free to make features specific to their own systems, but they also would have to work with the standards. For instance, Nikon's infrared-based wireless triggering could work with Nikon strobes, as long as it also could talk to an open standard of infrared strobes, as well as radio strobes.

A key standard would be for image transfer and sharing, something that would allow for easy access to images on a camera. Several of the camera manufacturers make apps that allow for wireless or wired transfer of images from the camera, but these are also proprietary, and let's face it, the camera manufacturers aren't particularly good app developers.

If a protocol was established for sharing files, and for remotely controlling cameras, app developers could create a world of sophisticated programs for manipulating images and controlling cameras, while the manufacturers would be free to develop better systems.

A standard for flashes and strobes, be they controlled by direct connection, wirelessly by infrared or radio transmission, or any future triggering system, would allow devices from various manufacturers to work with each other. A PocketWizard could trigger an Elinchrom strobe, a Nikon body could work with a Canon flash, and so on.

Another standard would allow devices with built-in WiFi to transmit files directly to clients, effectively turning a camera into a portable hard drive, and allowing a device like a phone or laptop to be the wireless transmitter. You can do this with WiFi accessories on the professional cameras, but any of the devices with built-in WiFi (and they all should have built-in WiFi) should be able to send files to a client without a plug-in component or an on-camera app.

A major advance would be an accessory standard that manufacturers could use to enable high-end cameras to add features without needing to connect things




▲ PANASONIC DG SUMMILUX 25MM *f*/1.4

to the *outside* of a camera. It would be incredible to add radio strobe control by sliding a transmitter into the bottom of a Canon pro DSLR (the same way you can add the same functionality to a Sekonic flash meter).

With communication protocols between devices, every accessory could talk to each other. A light meter could send its data to a camera and could control the output of a strobe. A strobe could tell the light meter what its settings are without the strobe having to trigger for a measurement. LED light panels could communicate their white balance settings, and so on.

Camera manufacturers aren't in a rush to integrate any cooperative standards in their devices, unfortunately. That's largely because the modern camera was invented in an era where secrecy and proprietary infrastructure were seen as advantages—the intellectual property of a camera company was as important as the mirrors, motors and optics they designed.

We live in a world of interoperability, driven by the application ecosystem of the modern mobile phone and the drive to simplify everyday life through automation and communication. If camera companies want to keep their products viable in an increasingly networked and cooperative world, they're going to need to see the ability to collaborate with other tools as an advantage and design accordingly. Otherwise, consumers are increasingly going to opt for their phones over their cameras, simply because they're easier to use and easier to network with the devices around them, even if their cameras still take superior images. DP

*You can follow David Schloss on Twitter and Instagram @davidjschloss.*

▼ OLYMPUS OM-D E-M10 MARK II

CANON POWERSHOT G3 X ▶


FINAL
schutt
SPIRIT

# Step Up To Adjustment Layers

## IMPROVE BRIGHTNESS, CONTRAST AND COLOR WITH PHOTOSHOP'S SIMPLEST AND MOST POWERFUL NONDESTRUCTIVE EDITING TOOLS

TEXT & PHOTOGRAPHY BY WILLIAM SAWALICH




One of the many things that makes Photoshop so powerful is its ability to facilitate nondestructive image editing. Traditionally, anytime a pixel is altered—even if it's just an adjustment to its luminance or color—image data has been modified in a way that can't be undone. Additional edits degrade data even more, and soon enough, the subtle detail, particularly in highlights and shadows, is lost.

By comparison, nondestructive editing doesn't alter a file's original image-forming data. The pixels that make up an image are untouched, and every edit is made virtually. This provides for powerful processing that doesn't degrade image quality, as well as the unlimited capacity to refine and undo every edit down the line. (This is the idea behind the adjustments in photo-editing tools like Lightroom and Apple's former Aperture, as well.)

Photoshop's most powerful nondestructive editing tool may be the Adjustment Layer. These specialized layers can alter color, contrast, brightness—practically any adjustment to a pixel you can imagine—without changing the original image's data.

Adjustment layers include these specific controls: Brightness/Contrast, Levels, Curves, Exposure, Vibrance, Hue/Saturation, Color Balance, Black & White, Photo Filter, Channel Mixer, Color Lookup, Invert, Posterize, Threshold, Selective Color and Gradient Map. If you're familiar with any of these adjustments as found in the Image menu, you're familiar with how they will work as adjustment layers, too.

To create an adjustment layer, you can use the Adjustment Layers palette for one-click access to the specific adjustment you'd like, or if you don't have the Adjustment Layers palette open on your screen, you can click the black/white circle icon at the bottom of the Layers palette to open a drop-down menu listing all of the available adjustment layers. Choose your preferred option, name the layer, if you care to, and click OK.

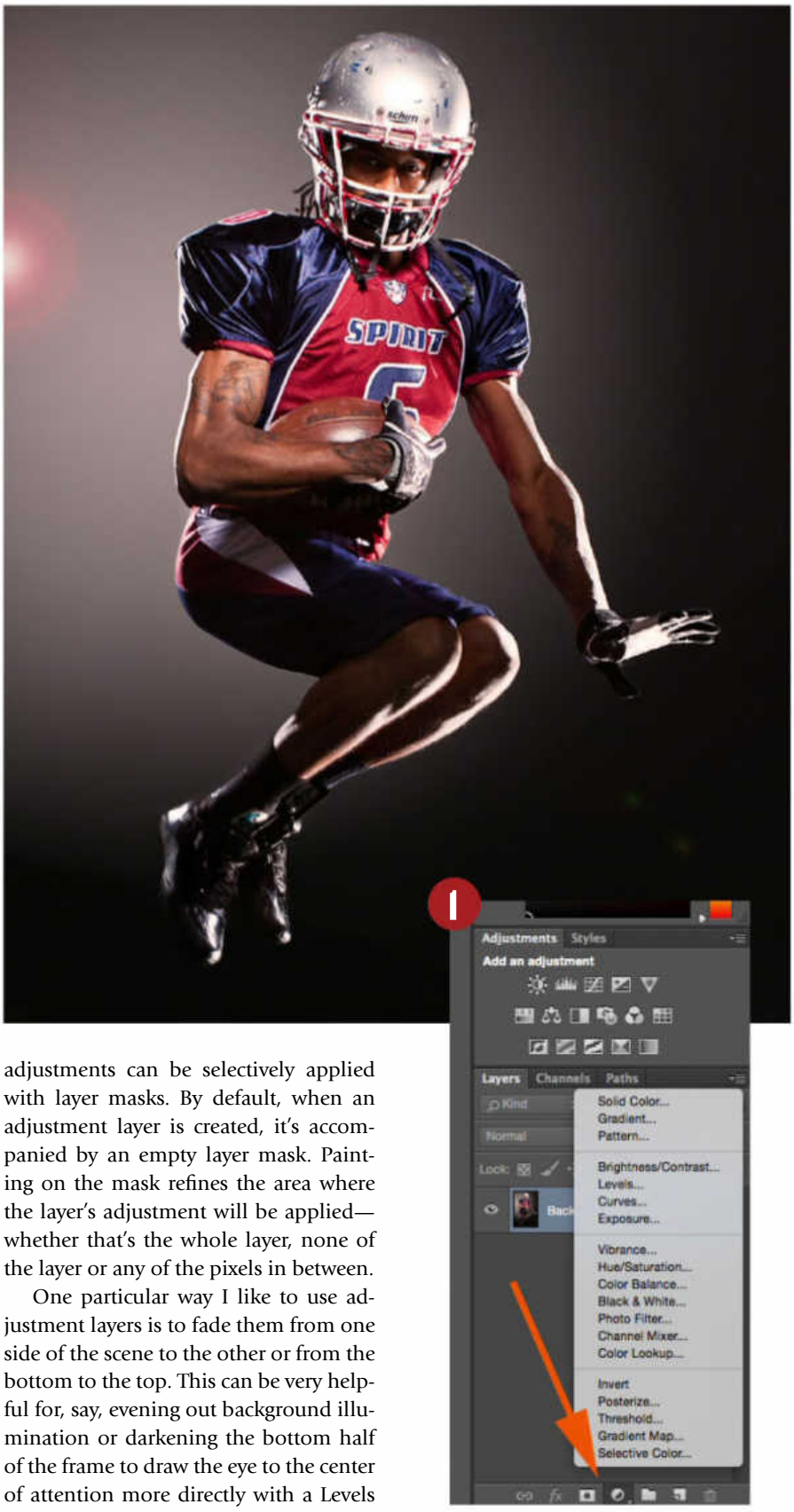
By default, adjustment layers apply to all of the layers below them. This is helpful because it can speed the editing workflow on a multilayered image. If you want to isolate an adjustment layer strictly to the layer immediately below, there's a method for that, too.

Say, for instance, you have a subject isolated on its own layer and the background on another layer. Simply click the "down arrow" icon at the bottom of the Adjustment Layers palette and the adjustment will be clipped to the layer immediately below, and it won't have any impact on any of the other layers.

To apply an adjustment layer to multiple layers, but not all layers, create a Group (Command+G or use the Create a New Group icon at the bottom of the Layers palette) and then clip the adjustment layer to only that group using the same "down arrow" icon.

Another advantage provided by adjustment layers is that the individual adjustments can be selectively applied with layer masks. By default, when an adjustment layer is created, it's accompanied by an empty layer mask. Painting on the mask refines the area where the layer's adjustment will be applied—whether that's the whole layer, none of the layer or any of the pixels in between.

One particular way I like to use adjustment layers is to fade them from one side of the scene to the other or from the bottom to the top. This can be very helpful for, say, evening out background illumination or darkening the bottom half of the frame to draw the eye to the center of attention more directly with a Levels

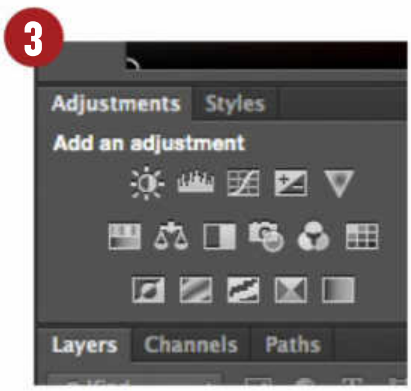





or Curves adjustment layer. Either way, I make this edit by using a gradient fill on the layer mask.

Click on the Gradient tool (hidden beneath the fill Paint Bucket tool on the Tool palette) and click on the adjustment layer's layer mask icon in the Layers palette to activate the mask. This will default the foreground and background colors to black and white—which, when applied to the layer mask, will read as opacity or transparency. You then can click and drag the Gradient tool from top to bottom or side to side to establish a gradient from clear to opaque and apply the adjustment layer selectively to one portion of the scene. The longer the click-and-drag of the Gradient tool, the softer and smoother the transition from opaque to transparent. The shorter that click-and-drag, the harder and faster that transition.

Adjustment layers can be modified, like any other layer, by adjusting the opacity and blending mode to alter the

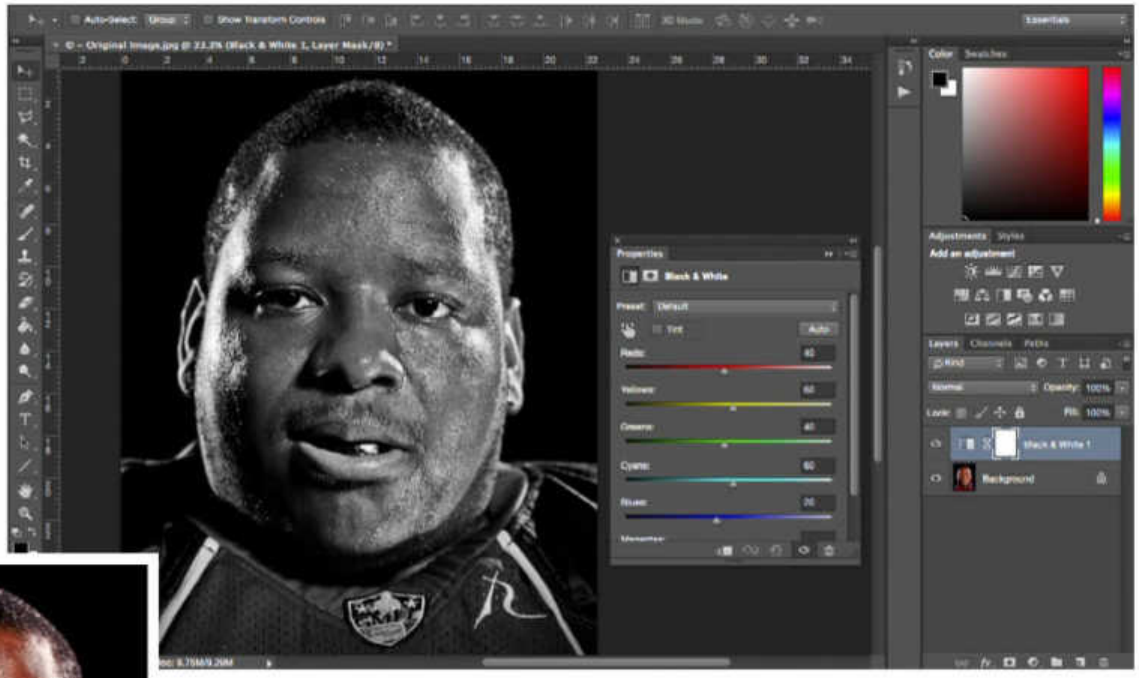








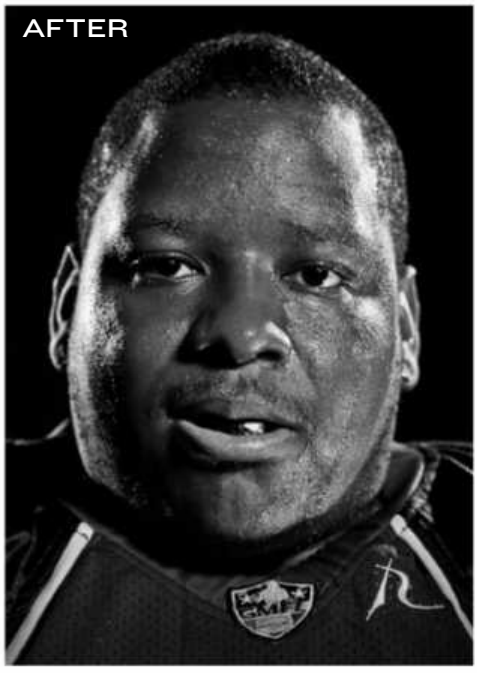


BEFORE



AFTER



impact. They also can be copied from one image and applied to another and another, making quick changes to a group of images quick and painless.

Some of my personal favorite uses for adjustment layers include the following:

• The Photo Filter, set to Warming Filter 85 and an opacity of anywhere between 5% and 25%, is a great way to add a touch of warmth to a portrait—something that's often quite useful.

• Levels and Curves are a wonderful way to make adjustments to contrast and brightness, as well as to isolate tonal values in shadows, midtones and highlights.

• The Black & White adjustment layer is the way to convert a color image to black-and-white. After clicking on the Black & White icon, use the color sliders to adjust the brightness and influence of each color in the black and white mix. Or, you can use the drop-down menu for a variety of preselected black and white mixes. If one recipe works better on one part of the frame and another mix works better on a different area, a layer mask followed by a second adjustment layer with a different black and white mix is the perfect way to get super-customized monochrome conversions.

• The Color Lookup adjustment layer got its start in the video world, but these filters work great for making special effects in still photographs, too. Technically speaking, color lookup tables map colors and tonal values to a new space, creating sometimes subtle effects and other times wild and wacky ones.

• For selectively altering a specific color in an image—the red of a lipstick, for instance, or the green leaves in a landscape—the Hue/Saturation adjustment layer is my first stop. I first select the color I'd like to modify using the drop-down menu in the adjustment layer's pop-up palette, and then I adjust it brighter or darker, more saturated or less, to get exactly the appearance I'm after. If the effect needs to be isolated, painting on the layer mask works perfectly. And, best of all, it easily can be modified later, as needed. DP

*William Sawalich is a commercial photographer, an educator and a contributing editor for Digital Photo, Digital Photo Pro and Outdoor Photographer magazines. Since 1998, he has written hundreds of equipment reviews, how-to articles and profiles of world-class photographers. See more of his work on his website at sawalich.com.*

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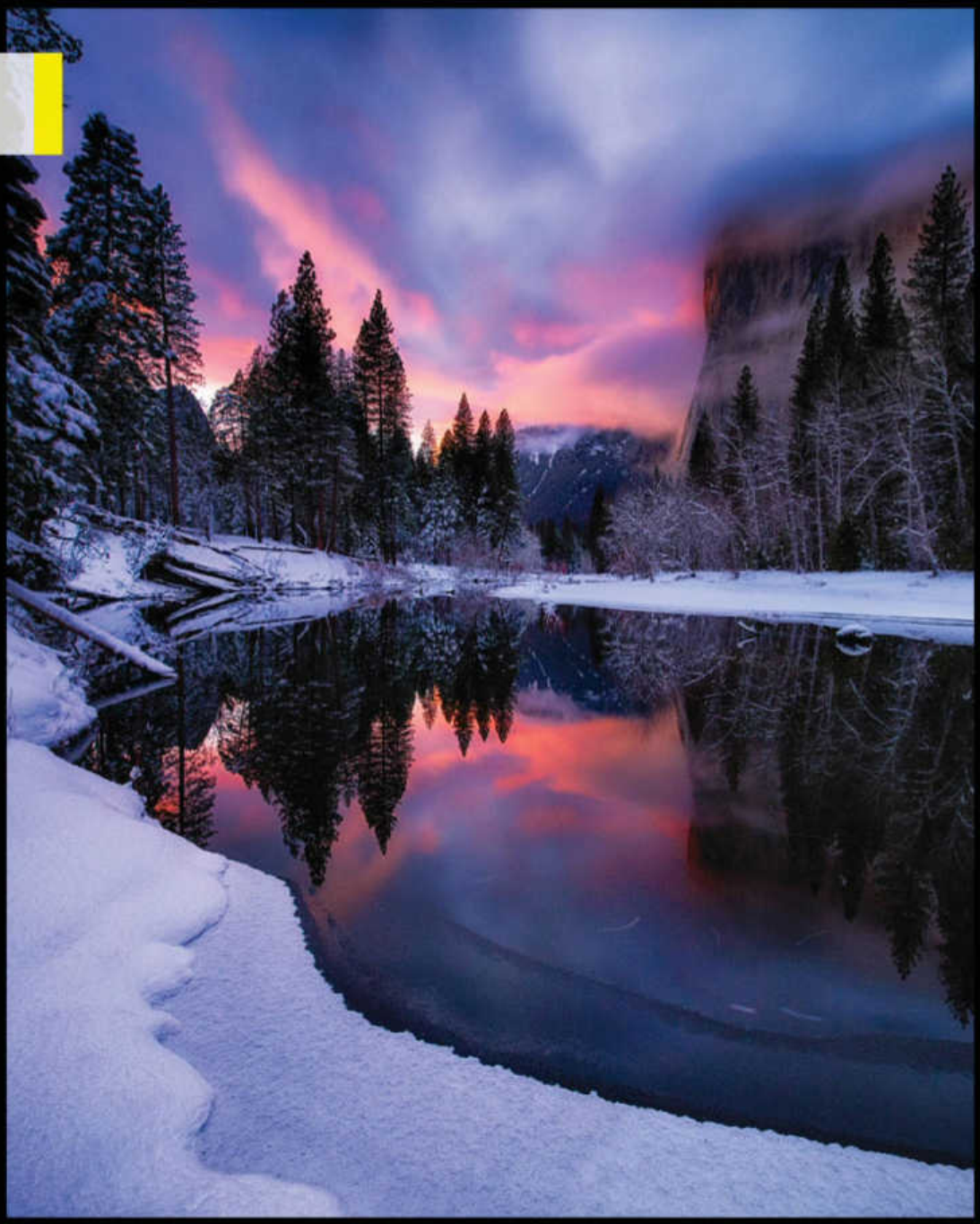



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ANTHONY BONAFEDE

# Winter's Twilight *Yosemite National Park, California*

"I'm fortunate to live close to the park, and my son Vincent and I had planned to capture the Three Brothers in the evening light," notes photographer Anthony Bonafede. "We've been to this location many times over the years, as it has one of the best views along the Merced River. Unfortunately, the sky wasn't cooperating, as the cloud cover to the east during sunset was too thick. Adapting to the current conditions, we decided to turn around to the wonderful view unfolding behind us. Photographing until it was almost dark, the last few frames had the benefit of twilight illuminating the sky. When the exposures were made, the ambient light was rather dim, and I felt a bracketed three-image exposure was needed to gain as much detail as possible of both the sky and the reflecting image of El Capitan in the icy Merced River." See more of Anthony Bonafede's work at AnthonyBonafede.com.

**Canon EOS 5D Mark III, Canon EF 16-35mm ƒ/2.8L II USM, ƒ/10, median exposure of 15 sec., bracketed at 2 stops (6 images were used), ISO 800, Really Right Stuff TVC-33 tripod, BH-55 ballhead, pano rail and L-bracket, Phottix Aion wireless shutter release, processed in Nik HDR Efex Pro 2, Adobe Photoshop and Lightroom CC 2015**

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